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Latino Parent Decision-Making in Selecting a Public Urban Charter School

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Latino Parent Decision-Making in Selecting a Public Urban Charter School

by

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Treatise

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Dedication

This body of work is dedicated to my mom and my two greatest gifts, my children, Miranda and Noah.

Mom, I wish you were here to witness this milestone, this dream realized, because you are the reason I have achieved. You may not have noticed, but I watched you. You worked hard, and it instilled in me a work ethic that has sustained me and kept me focused when I was tired and wanted to give up. You were brave and courageous, taking steps and making decisions that were not easy, but you were determined to create a better life for me, and so you acted in faith. Even during the most challenging of times, you were steadfast, and I learned what it means to persevere. Above all, by your life, I learned what love is, and with that same love I say thank you and dedicate this work to you.

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Abstract

Latino Parent Decision-Making in Selecting a Public Urban Charter School

by Brenda Alicia Rangel, Ed.D.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2021

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School Choice has become a highly sought alternative to educate students. However, as districts contemplate embracing charter schools to serve students from diverse backgrounds, researchers continue to debate its merits (Quinn & Ogburn, 2020; Welner, 2013). While parents play a crucial role in selecting a charter school (Mawene & Ball 2018), a few researchers have determined how parents select a charter school. This is especially the case for parents who face additional challenges, like Latinos, as they interact with the education market and how they consider to enroll their children in charter schools (Delaney, 2007; Mavrogordato, 2016). Further research illuminates aspects of charter schools such as parent motivation, academic impact, and factors influencing parents' selection (Fiel et al., 2003; Marshall, 2017).

However, few have focused on Latino parents' perceptions regarding the selection of a secondary public charter school. Thus, this study examined 15 Latino parents' motivations, what they consider when deciding to choose a secondary charter school, and what influences their decision-making in a large urban school district. The research followed a qualitative approach to discover parents' views about selecting a

charter school—two primary data sources were employed; interviews and pertinent documents. Data analysis followed an inductive process (Thomas, 2006). The study revealed that Latino parents have specific reasons to select secondary charter schools, use particular strategies as part of their selection, review salient factors they consider as they make a decision, and once choosing a school, they enroll their children. This study attempted to expand our understanding of Latino parent decision-making when selecting a charter school. Findings may inform school leaders why and how families choose to educate their children in such schools. In addition, the study provides other parents with an insight into the critical factors in selecting a public charter educational setting over a large public urban school district by revealing Latino parents' decision-making selection process.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Charter schools have become an essential option within the school choice movement and have attracted parents' interest in searching for better education opportunities for their children across the nation in urban and suburban regions. As the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (NAPCS) reports, over 7,500 public charter schools educated almost 3.3 million students in 44 states and the District of Columbia in 2020 (NAPCS, 2020). In accordance with this phenomenon, C.E. Finn, president emeritus of the Thomas B. Fordham Institute states, that school choice has become prevalent since "way too few kids in America have been able to pick their schools, and way too many have been stuck in bad schools that they have no alternative to" (Jason, 2017 p. 26). However, previous researchers suggest that many but not all public-funded charter schools successfully provide expanded, innovative educational opportunities for students. Rendering to Darling-Hammond and Montgomery (2008), many charter schools have met their commitment to serving all students, yet some advocates believe there are still issues of access and equity in school choice. Educators assess how to best meet the needs of the ever-growing linguistically and culturally varied student population in this diverse educational landscape.

School districts across America are exploring ways to build on parents' and schools' relationships to improve students (Tran, 2014). In addition, others note that attempts at educational reform have taken a parent-centered approach. According to Ratcliff and Hunt, embracing parental involvement as part of the educational process can

be defined as policy-making, volunteer activities, parent education, and information sharing; however, the definition of family involvement has not been finalized (2009). More recently, parent engagement has come to school leaders' and researchers' attention due to an increasing interest in charter schools, which requires that parents go beyond traditional roles and are viewed as the key decision-makers. For instance, researchers have focused on: school choice decision-making among suburban high-income parents (Altenhofen, Berends & White, 2016); Hispanic parents' voices (Bluum, 2016); and access choice of how Latino parents engage in the educational marketplace (Mavrogordato & Stein, 2016). However, questions related to parent decision-making when choosing a charter school remain. As Berends (2015) and others suggest, school choice may offer various formats, and charter schools appear to have expanded. As a result, parents face the challenge of selecting schools and deciding which charter schools best fit their children. By doing so, they are considering additional criteria that might guide their goal of providing the best education for their children. This encounter is particularly challenging for parents from diverse backgrounds, such as Latino parents. For this study, Latino parents include parents who might have come from Latin American descent or Hispanic background.

As a form of school choice, charter schools have emerged to respond to federal and state legislative requirements to educate all children and continues to be a critical expectation. The 21st century saw implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) with a focal point on governmental Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) goals to

ensure that all students receive a high-quality education. NCLB focused on school choice, encouraging parent empowerment, and allowing school districts to concentrate on underperforming schools. Schools were mandated to collaborate with and inform parents of various school choice options (Department of Education, 2008). This primary federal legislation made it possible for parents and families to actively engage in critical decision-making about all educational processes (Kappor, 2002).

In 2009, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) rewarded nineteen states with funding from the Race to the Top (RTTT) initiative for developing and implementing performance pay systems that would improve low-achieving schools and expand charter schools (Levy, 2017). Race to the Top created an environment for the expansion of charter schools. According to The Department of Education, Public School Choice (2009), the \$4.35 billion in funding would support effective charter schools and State Education Agencies (SEAs), with a record of supporting effective charter schools, would be held to high accountability standards.

Darrow (2016) explains that on December 10, 2015, President Barrack Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) educational reform legislation, which reauthorizes the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) and replaces the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). The K-12 educational policy, ESEA, authorized an increase in school budgets and vowed to enforce educational equality for every student regardless of race, ethnicity, disability, English proficiency, or income.

According to the American Institute for Research (2020), ESSA expands on the federal Charter Schools Program and the federal Magnet Schools Assistance Program. These competitive grants provide funding to support the creation and continuation of high-quality magnet and charter schools. Both Charter Schools Program and Magnet Schools Assistance have gained increased flexibility, especially regarding ESSA funding. ESSA's focus on independence has allowed educational stakeholders to develop, revise, and refine charter school efforts and goals.

Several states have progressive policies to guide charter schools' implementation and expansion to better inform parents at the state level. For instance, in 2019 Texas Charter School Association (TCSA) published *The Truth About Texas Charter Schools*, a report that offered information about charter schools' benefits and outcomes, with highlights such as "Public charter schools send more students to college and more public charter school students complete advanced courses while in high school" (p. 15). "Minority and historically underserved student populations at public charter schools outperform their traditional ISD peers in every single subject" (p. 17).

Reportedly, charter schools do better in postsecondary education completion rates and student enrollment in higher education. According to The Truth About Texas Charter Schools publication, there currently exists 141,000 student names on Texas public charter school waiting lists but not enough schools (p. 3). "Public charter schools enroll a higher percentage of students from historically underserved families" (p. 11). But while this report illustrates what might prompt Latino parents to select these schools, it is unclear

how these parents choose a charter school and what information they access about specific charter school requirements and outcomes. Therefore, this study focuses on Latino parents' perspectives.

This chapter outlines the study's statement of the problem, purpose, research questions, methodology, the definition of terms, delimitations and limitations of the review, assumptions, the study's significance, and an overall summary.

Statement of the Problem

In April of 2016, the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools survey found that Latino parents believed their children's education was one of the most critical issues in the United States. The survey also discovered that school choice plays a vital role in the Latino community's education arena. The survey's findings detailed that 85 percent of Latino parents favor allowing parents to choose which public school their child attends. The rise of Latino students in charter schools indicates that Latino parents are taking advantage of charter school resources and deciding to choose public charter schools for their children's education. According to National Center for Education Statistics, Latino students make up about 30 percent of the charter school population and now hold a larger share of Latino students than the 25 percent share represented in district public schools (2016).

Thirty percent of charter school students are Latino, representing only 2 percent of students in grades 1-12. Acknowledging such interest, Mavrogordato and Stien suggest, "School choice has become a cornerstone of education reform plans across the

nation, especially in urban settings where immigrant populations often settle. Latino enrollment in charter schools has increased accordingly. Yet, there is scarce scholarship about how Latino parents, who arguably face significant linguistic, curial and economic barriers, engage in the choice process” (2016, p. 1035). Consequently, access to information and knowledge for parents to choose a charter school is critical. The power of information is vital in an educational marketplace (Jabbar, 2015).

Access to charter school selection information to ensure that parents have the knowledge needed in a school choice decision-making process is critical. Unfortunately, when it comes to school choice, many parents do not know their educational options. Knowing this to be accurate, many charter schools focus on equity and put into place many resources to ensure that parents know their school choice options. Siegel-Hawley (2014) adds that if there are no specific laws and policies that address the disparity in informational access, public school choice can perpetuate racial and socioeconomic stratification. The institutions must provide alternatives while also informing parents of the sometimes complex application process that may require different data from other campuses. Holmes-Erickson (2017) suggests that many do not see parents as rational decision-makers when selecting quality schools for their children. A salient point amongst many is whether disadvantaged parents with few resources can make this critical decision.

School Choice advocates believe parents can obtain vital information to select the school that best meets their child’s needs. As many districts continue to struggle to

educate the Latino community, and the enrollment of this group in traditional public schools decreases, it is imperative to investigate the key factors Latino parents consider when choosing charter schools over traditional public schools. Some researchers have examined the decisions Latino parents make. Mavrogordado and Stein focused on Latino and non-Latino parents' considerations of charter schools and their motivations and decisions in selecting a charter school. They sought to "better understand how parents, especially those who face layers of disadvantages, like Latinos, interact with the education marketplace" (2014, p. 1033). However, others suggest that additional research is still needed to examine further aspects of charter school selections, such as academic impact, parental motivations, and factors influencing their decisions (Fiel, Haskins, & Turley, 2013; Marshall, 2017).

Purpose of the Study

Researchers note that more Latino parents opt to enroll their students in public charter schools, and these parents' participation in school choice — public charter schools — is higher than other minority groups (Gastic & Coronado, 2011). Similarly, some researchers have examined what motivates Latino parents' decisions to enroll their children in charter schools and suggest that many have difficulty understanding the vast choices provided in a popular marketplace when Latino parents consider school choice options (Mavrogordato & Stein, 2014).

Given the increased interest in charter schools, as suggested by the waiting lists of Texas public charter schools (TCSA, nd), there is still a need to illuminate parents' voices

to enhance our understanding of their considerations and factors they take into account when selecting a charter school, particularly at the secondary education level. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine Latino parental decision-making, specifically in charter schools within a large urban school district in Texas. The research explored Latino parents' motivation to enroll their children in secondary public charter schools over traditional public secondary schools.

Research Questions

This study addressed the following questions:

- 1) Why do Latino parents select secondary public charter schools over traditional public schools in a large urban school district?
- 2) What strategies do Latino parents use when selecting a secondary public charter school for their children?
- 3) What factors influence Latino parents' decision-making when selecting a secondary public charter school in a large urban district?
- 4) How do Latino parents decide to enroll their children in a secondary public charter school?

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research paradigm. According to Peshkin (1993), a qualitative research study's primary purpose is to describe the nature of setting processes and relationships and interpret new insights and perspectives with a particular phenomenon. Additionally, qualitative research allows the researcher to verify

assumptions and claims and evaluate the effectiveness of policies and practices. This qualitative study followed a structured approach. Structured approaches assist in the data analysis of interviewees and play an integral part in tackling uncountable questions that deal with various responses (Maxwell, 2004).

The study drew from two primary data sources: interviews and documents, such as campus accountability reports, websites, and enrollment processes information. The interviews were conducted with fifteen Latino parents in current charter schools in a large Texas urban district. Creswell and Clark (2010) emphasize that gathering data via an interview is one of the most common approaches when collecting qualitative data. The process included questioning participants with open-ended questions that allowed them to respond individually. There are five aspects of interviewing: having a reason for asking questions, the type of questions asked, specific questions asked in the interview, the procedure of capturing information from the interview, and the inclusion of the interview process.

The methodology facilitated the underlying process of gathering information and collecting multiple data sources that could shed light on the research questions of interest in a meaningful way (Greene & Caracelli, 1997). This study focused on secondary education, including one middle and one high school public charter school with a Texas Education Agency (TEA) rating of “A” in the 2019 TEA accountability. The schools must have been in operation for at least twenty years and have over 50 percent Latino enrollment. Study participants were purposely selected to include six Latino parents of

middle school students and nine Latino parents of high school students. Each set of parents represented each grade level. Once the data from the parents and administrators were collected, triangulation ensured the study's validity and reliability. According to Fielding (2012), triangulation contains diverse participants' information to reduce systemic biases. Due to the current COVID-19 environment, the researcher took extraordinary precautions regarding health and safety protocols when interviewing administrators and parents. All recorded communication between study participants and the researcher was recorded, transcribed, and coded for responses. Interviews took place over the phone and via Zoom © conferences.

Definition of Terms

Authorizer. The government entity is charged with overseeing a charter school's academic and financial performance. Every charter school first needs an authorizer's permission to open its doors and renew that operating authority every few years.

Charter Management Organization (CMOs). Nonprofit entities that manage two or more charter schools. CMOs often provide back-office functions for charter schools to take advantage of economies of scale, but some also offer a more comprehensive range of services – including hiring, professional development, data analysis, public relations, and advocacy.

Charter schools. Public schools that are independent of school districts through contracts with state or local boards. Charter schools exercise increased autonomy in

return for greater accountability and draw up their own “charter,” a set of rules and performance standards.

Latino parents. Participants from Latin American or descendants of Latin America but are also inclusive of Hispanic parents.

Parents. Refers to the biological parents and guardians and other family members who serve as parental figures and decide about their children’s schooling.

Parental decision-making. The process of considering alternatives to select the best options for their children.

School choice. A nationwide movement to empower parents by enabling them to make the best possible choice for their children’s education. In short, it puts the power in the hands of parents to decide which type of education best fits the needs of their particular child – whether that is a public, private or religious institution or educating their child at home.

Traditional public schools. School systems must adhere to the state education board’s education standards and are not exempt from any state, federal, or local laws regarding education. They are governed by the school district, which is run by a democratically elected school board.

Delimitations of Study

This study’s primary focus was on secondary education, including middle and high school charter schools within a large urban district in Texas. Participants were Latino parents who have chosen to enroll their children in secondary charter schools.

Groups who were not included in the study are students, teachers and campus administrators. Additionally, the researcher focused on charter schools that have significantly influenced an urban school district's enrollment over the past two decades.

Limitations of Study

Certain limitations unique to qualitative research were acknowledged. According to Lincoln (1992), qualitative research methodology poses certain limitations that must address the usage of various techniques to ensure its quality. It is also imperative to note that there were no generalizations. Another restraint of this study is one's subjectivity as a researcher and interviewer. Interviews can be difficult when participants, in this case, parents, are shy or hesitant to speak and share experiences openly (Creswell, 2013). This possible barrier may result in a further limitation in this study of participants' not being candid or transparent about their experiences, hindering research results. So, establishing a relationship with the participants before conducting the interviews was critical to ensuring accurate responses. It is also essential to distinguish the unequal power dynamic, a contributing factor, between parents and researcher as an interviewer. The perception of power and possible relationships with the participants could influence their responses, as they may feel they should provide safe responses rather than detailed individual responses about their personal experiences (Creswell, 2013).

Assumptions

The study was conducted with the following assumptions. First, Latino parents select charter schools because they outperform traditional schools and recruit the

brightest students. Second, Latino parents might have particular difficulty in searching for or accessing information about charter schools. Third, intentional parental research benefits the decision-making process prior to selecting a school for their children. And, finally, Latino parents would be open to sharing their insights and be honest in explaining their charter school selection.

Significance of the Study

This study expanded on current research regarding the role of Latino parents' decision-making on charter schools. Since it examined Latino parents' self-described motivations in choosing public school charters over traditional neighborhood public schools, the study's findings might inform traditional public schools about why and how families choose to educate their children in charter schools. It also uncovered the perception of those who are often overlooked and addresses the gap in research that intersects race, class, and educational advancement, and expands the motivations for school choice processes and patterns, particularly for Latino families.

The findings from this study provided other parents with insight into the critical factors for choosing a public charter educational setting over a large public urban school district by illuminating Latino parents' decision-making selection process. This study generated information on how parents see themselves as educational decision-makers and how they engage in the education marketplace, thus contributing to competition that might yield quality education for all. The results might also inform urban public school administrators to understand current parental experiences as they navigate educational

decisions to meet their child's needs, and serve as a resource for attracting parents successfully, thereby increasing enrollment and generating more revenue for the emerging Latino communities. Furthermore, this study yields information that school leaders and parents can use to support a positive environment for all students and serve as a source for attracting parents.

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the study, identifying problems regarding public charter school parental decision-making and the significance of examining integral factors for why parents choose public charter schools rather than traditional public district schools. Chapter I provided a context for parental decision-making in public charter schools. The next chapter is a comprehensive review of the literature that frames parental decision-making.

Chapter II. Literature Review

As our educational institutions continue to search for ways to serve all students, the school choice movement generated several options for parents to become more active in choosing a school with better potential to meet their children's education, social and emotional needs. One alternative that has become highly regarded by parents in urban and suburban areas is public charter schools.

A charter school option is not a new concept; it has evolved and gained a reputation as a site-based educational management system, in which school districts return control to school (Hiatt, 1994). Individual schools have a governing board whose membership includes school administrators, teachers, parents, and community members. The site-based charter school board contributes to curriculum, budgets, staffing and campus events.

As a school choice option, research suggests that a charter school offers several advantages over traditional schools and responds to federal, state and local expectations. Some researchers have examined the benefits, characteristics and outcomes of school choice. Perhaps more importantly, evidence suggests that school choice programs may have broader positive impacts on long-term effects. For instance, experimental and quasi-experimental studies found that school choice programs increase graduation rates (Cowen et al., 2013). Others reported that school choice alternatives contribute to higher college enrollment (Chingos & Kuehn, 2017; Chingos & Peterson, 2015).

Additionally, studies regarding social issues report that school choice can decrease criminal activity (DeAngelis & Wolf, 2016; Deming, 2011; Dills & Hernandez-Julian, 2011) and reduce teen pregnancy (Dobbie & Fryer, 2015). However, a review of the eleven experimental and quasi-experimental studies linking private school choice to civic outcomes found little to no impact on social tolerance, civic engagement, and crime reduction (DeAngelis, 2017). A more extensive study by the Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO) at Stanford University surveyed twenty-six states offering a charter school option. This study concluded that charter schools provide the most significant academic promise for inner-city students (CREDO, 2015).

School choice has received considerable attention from federal legislation. Starting with The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2002), school choice has encouraged parental empowerment. NCLB offered parents, with children in failing schools, access to the school choice options. This primary federal legislation made it possible for parents and families to actively engage themselves in critical decision-making in all aspects of the educational process (Kappor, 2002). As the Department of Education (2008) proclaims, the NCLB expectations also specifically encouraged schools to inform and collaborate with parents of the various school choice options.

After the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (2015) replaced No Child Left Behind (NCLB), educators' mindset changed from considering parent participation as parent involvement to parent engagement. As a result, parents became empowered, actively committed to attending activities, and learned how to monitor their children's

academic progress effectively. In addition, educators were encouraged to collaborate with parents and set learning goals for their students to increase student achievement. ESSA's goals were to engage parents in their child's learning process and the school community to ensure better outcomes for all students (ESSA, 2016).

In the last two decades, forty-five states and the District of Columbia have passed laws supporting public charter schools as a school choice option. There are currently over 7,000 public charter schools in the United States (David & Hesla, 2018). According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2018), public interest in alternative public schooling, including charter schools, has risen dramatically. Between 2000 and 2017, the number of charter schools grew substantially from 1,990 to 7,010. In the same period, the number of traditional public schools decreased from 93,270 to 91,150.

Specifically in Texas, the 74th Texas Legislature established the first-ever open-enrollment charter schools (Texas Education Code [TEC], Chapter 12, Subchapter D, 1996) in 1995. The Open-enrollment charter concept promoted local bodies to bring innovative approaches to meet the educational needs of students. The legislation considered charter schools to be public schools, yet they are exempt from many state regulations required for traditional public schools, according to TEC (§12.001, 2019). Open-enrollment charter schools are fiscally and academically accountable to laws and rules but do not adhere to specific instructional methods or pedagogical innovation.

In 2013, the 83rd Texas Legislature's amended statute awarded the State Board of Education (SBOE) the authority to grant and veto charters while increasing the number of

open-enrollment charters (TEC §12.101, 2013). According to the Texas Education Agency (TEA) Enrollment in Texas Public Schools 2019-20 Report, 180 open-enrollment charter schools, and 787 open-enrollment charter school campuses served 336,900 students. During this time, statewide enrollment in charter campuses increased from the previous year by 6.3 percent. When reviewing data for the last decade (2009-10 and 2019-20), open-enrollment charter school enrollment increased for African American, Hispanic, and multiracial students. The report also indicates that across the five largest racial/ethnic groups in 2019-20, Hispanic students made up the largest percentage of total enrollment in Texas charter schools, followed by African American, White, Asian, and multiracial students. Subsequently, in 2019-20, 70.8 percent of the students in charter schools met the state criteria for economic disadvantage.

According to the *Truth About Texas Charter Schools* report, “minority and historically underserved student populations at public charter schools outperform their traditional ISD peers in every single subject.” Students also “do better in postsecondary education completion rates, student enrollment in higher education and dual enrollment or advance courses” (Charter School Association, 2019, p. 17). As a result, public charter schools have seen an increase in minority parents’ interest in considering these schools for their children. However, it is still unclear how parents from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds see the school choice options, such as charter schools, or what they look for before enrolling their children in school choice alternatives. Therefore, it is imperative to understand better why Latino parents enroll their children in these schools. It is also

necessary to determine what they consider as they contemplate selecting a public charter school, how they obtain information, what factors influence their thinking, what parents value most, and how they go about making an informed decision. This chapter provides an analysis and summary of the extant literature and serves as a foundation for studying Latino parents' decision-making in selecting a public charter school. This review is organized into five strands: a brief background of school choice, the characteristics of charter schools, the factors involved in a charter school selection, parent engagement in charter schools, and Latino parents' decision-making process when choosing a charter school.

Background of School Choice

The movement for school choice began in the 1960s when parents sought alternative school reform models, such as charter schools (Schnieder et al., 2000). Charter Schools have gained attention since their initial inception. Comparing charter schools and traditional public schools, the nation's views on alternative educational schools have shifted fundamentally in recent decades. As a result, competition between these two options has emerged as a considerable thought to improve all students' education quality. Friedman (2002) noted that giving parents the freedom to choose would open competition between schools to meet their children's needs. Similarly, Samuels (2012) suggested that schools compete intensely for students across the country, thus developing rigorous marketing campaigns to entice students and parents to enroll and stay at their campuses.

According to Holley et al. (2013), as school choice policies continued to expand, many districts changed their strategies to remain competitive. Some school districts have accepted that the choice sector will continue to flourish, knowing that these schools raise student academic achievement. As a result, it appears that charter schools pose a threat to traditional public schools by enrolling students and demonstrating that they, too, can reflect, replicate, experiment and enter into partnerships with school choice providers. The authors suggest that while bureaucratic change takes time, traditional schools can improve and compete within the changing environments.

Prior studies support the notion that school choice positively impacts student outcomes due to teachers' and parents' enhanced roles. Further, investigations of parental options and whether school choice will achieve the current goals of educational reform movements suggest that parental decision-making is a critical component of alternative education models to address specific issues. For instance, Ravitch (2013) advanced the notion that school choice envisioned a public education system built around parent-student choice, school competition, and school autonomy to solve what they saw as the problem of governmental intervention in public schools. While school choice provides a certain level of freedom to parents, it must be guided and respond to federal and state legislation. Doing so may guarantee that options, such as charter schools, comply with academic rigor and applicable funding requirements.

School choice legislation. In 1965, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) required parents to become active in their children's education. Due to legislation, parents now had a voice on whether their children should enter and exit specific special education programs, including bilingual education programs. Parental involvement at the time included membership in advisory boards, classrooms and extracurricular events.

Later, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2002) addressed school choice and encouraged parental empowerment. NCLB offered parents with children in failing schools access to the school choice process. Bayham (2014) stated that NCLB expected schools to provide explicit information about various school choice options and collaborated with parents to ensure their decisions were based on a clear understanding of the educational opportunities. This primary federal legislation made it possible for parents and families to actively engage in critical decision-making in all aspects of the educational process (Kappor, 2002).

The NCLB era gave districts a sense of urgency regarding parent involvement. Communities were encouraging parent-school partnerships, emphasizing that the more parents understood how participation matters, the more they would become involved. These policies highlighted key economic discrepancies between middle and working-class parents. Middle-class parents were more engaged in elementary-level education and provided educational opportunities at home. Working-class parents tended to separate home and school life, entrusting educators and the educational process, and although

parents had similar opportunities for parental involvement in school, the upper-middle-class families took advantage of parent-teacher conferences, internal communication, and workshops provided by experts (NCLB, 2002). The literature suggests that parent participation in their child's school correlates with student outcomes (Sebastian, et al., 2017). Parent involvement in charter schools has recently focused on student achievement, yet scholarship on the impact of a parent's decision to transfer schools and the correlation to social networks and student mobility is not well developed (Fiel, Haskins, & Turley, 2013).

It is also important to note that current legislation has provided funding and financial incentives to support school choice options, such as charter schools. For example, several researchers report that the expansion of charter school issues is part of millions of dollars and incentives from governmental grants and private foundations (Berliner & Glass, 2014; Persson, 2015; Nathan, 1998; & Persson, 2015). Similarly, both George Bush and Barack Obama administrations continued to fund the market-based school choice option in education (Persson, 2015). More recently, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (2016) established unprecedented funding to expand high-performing charter schools.

Vara-Orta (2019) reported that ESSA ensures that states and districts create a vision for embracing a plan and guidelines to include families and other stakeholders involved in the school community. Advocates believe that these guidelines create stronger partnerships and higher-achieving schools. Vito Borrello, Executive Director of

the National Association for Family and Community Engagement, sees this partnership as an opportunity. He states, “There is a lot of excitement and more of an evolution in where both policymakers and funders feel like they want to put their money increasingly” (Vara-Orta, 2019, p. 22). According to The Leadership Conference Education Fund (2016), the guidelines for parent and family engagement within ESSA promote effective communication and involvement of parents, including establishing a viable collaborative partnership comprised of school, parents, and community. ESSA requires schools to provide parents and guardians with information and communicate how teachers plan to work with family members as equal partners to monitor academic progress. The ESSA parent guidebooks are in plain language and share the flexibility of the requirements.

In 2018, Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos was cited by ESSA as stating in a news release:

At the core of ESSA is an acknowledgment that Washington does not know best when educating our nation’s students. Our focus is on returning power to the hands of parents, states, and local educators, where it belongs. Because states and districts have significant flexibility in how they meet the requirements of the law, parents should know and have a voice in how they use that flexibility to best help their children. These new resources will help empower those closest to students with the information they need to be informed advocates as education decisions come up at the state and local levels.

Since the mid-20th century, landmark cases and legislation have advocated for parental involvement in public education through school choice options. However, within the extant literature on schooling, the representation of diverse racial parental participation in educational reform has been limited; therefore, further examination of the current dynamics of school reform through alternatives to public education is needed.

School choice alternatives. Recent research has shown school choice as an assortment of options for students and their parents in elementary and secondary schools. Alternatives may include enrollment into other public school systems within the district, charter schools, or religious or nonsectarian private schools. Approximately 3.4 percent of students opt to receive education from home, called “homeschooling” (Wang et al., 2019). Another form of school choice that became popular due to the Internet and continuous evolution in technology is virtual schooling. Instead of traditional public schools, students participate in virtual learning through computers and online resources.

According to the Department of Education, during the 2013-14 school year, approximately 200,000 students in 478 schools received their education via virtual school (Kena et al., 2015). In addition, school choice options may also include open enrollment (NCES, 2018). This public educational structure offers parents an opportunity to select a school inside or outside district boundaries. In 2017, thirty-seven states had laws that included open enrollment.

School choice alternatives appear to be appealing for various reasons. As Wang et al. (2016) suggest, family characteristics tend to drive school-option sentiments. Students

in cities have more choice options than rural students, and lower socioeconomic parents consider using school choice options more than those in an upper economic bracket. Seventy-seven percent of private school parents were satisfied with their children's education. In comparison, 60 percent of students who selected their public school, and 54 percent of students who attended their assigned school, were pleased with their education. Others suggest that school choice alternatives were preferred due to academic quality, reputation and distance between school and home (Altenhofen, Berends, & White, 2016); family means, i.e., transportation and childcare (Lareau and Goyette, 2014); and accessibility to information about a specific school's academic results (Hastings & Weinstein, 2008).

It appears from previous research that there are several reasons for selecting school choice alternatives. There is broad agreement that school choice is often political; however, the substance lies with parent's prerogative to enroll their children in a chosen school. Parents' array of options has placed them in a primary stakeholder position in educational institutions across the United States. Schools and districts must meet parents' demands by offering varied instructional options while competing with other providers. Pittinsky (2018) suggests that parental school choice makes a significant difference for children and, as stated previously, one essential and expanding school choice option for parents to consider is charter schools.

Public charter schools. Most of the research seems to indicate that charter schools originated, in part, to provide more opportunities for innovative practices. As some advocates argued, these schools were stifled by the bureaucracy of district-run education and tedious municipal regulations (Bulkley, 2011). Charter schools were known as publicly funded independent schools established by teachers, parents or community groups under the terms of a charter with a local or national charter school authority. According to the National Charter School Resource Center, the charter school concept was initially introduced as a school option “run by teams of teachers and charged with creating an innovative solution to the challenge of underserved students” (Charter School Center, n/d, p. 2). Since then, charter schools have expanded considerably and have gone through several critical events, as illustrated by the following chronology:

- 1991 Minnesota passed the first charter school law.
- 1992 A group of teachers interested in supporting older teens and young adults opened the first charter school in St. Paul, MN.
- 1994 Congress established the Department of Education’s Charter School Program (CSP) to provide funding to State Education Agencies to create and support charter schools.
- 2005 Charter schools served approximately 2% of all students.
- 2006 Charter schools served about 5% of all students.
- 2019 West Virginia became the 45th state to allow charter schools.

(National Charter School Resource Center NCSRC, n/d
charterschoolcenter.ed.gov.)

According to NCSRC, the number of charter schools for the 2018-2019 school year was 7,486, serving approximately three million students. The percentage of parents

who publicly support charter schools is 50 percent. The demographic information in the fall of 2016 indicates that the number of students served by charter schools included 33% Hispanic, 32% White, 26% Black, 4% Asian/Pacific Islander, 4% students from two or more races, and 1% American Indian/Alaskan Native (charterschools.center.ed.gov).

As charter schools expanded, researchers examined the organizational characteristics of these schools. According to Kolderie (2005), Ray Budde, the founder of charter schools, explored the organizational structure as one of the initial contributors to the charter movement. He began researching school district reorganization and explored the central concept where teachers gained voice by directly receiving educational charters from the school board. Budde recommended that educators have an opportunity to lobby their local school boards and establish an autonomous public setting at no cost to the students. Although charter schools relish their independence, compared to traditional schools, they are still held accountable to their fundamental principles created by the Charter (Thomsen, 2016). For Budde, the charter school movement motivated him to advance an educational infrastructure that had the freedom to make independent decisions while supporting schools and transforming traditional public schools within districts (Bulkley, 2011). A significant aspect of enabling such innovation was to increase the flexibility and autonomy available to charter school leaders and staff. Charter schools' freedom varies considerably; some states provide broad waivers for all charter schools, while others offer limited exemptions based on specific requests. However, there are certain characteristics common to most.

Characteristics of Public Charter Schools

While charter schools are public schools, they are different from traditional public schools in some respects. According to Caffee (2018), charter schools can be differentiated by at least five characteristics: 1) funding—charter schools are funded on a per-pupil basis with government funds and, at times, private funding, but typically receive less of an allotment overall, 2) government regulation—charter schools are run independently but must meet standards outlined in their charter to secure state funding, 3) teacher certification—teachers in charter schools do not necessarily have to be certified, but this differs from state to state, 4) curriculum flexibility—curriculum in charter schools enjoys flexibility, but these are held accountable to a performance contract, and 5) application process—charter schools require applications, but students do not always have to take an entrance exam. In reference to funding, Hanushek et al. (2007) assert that charter schools are funded by public grants from the federal government and offer tuition-free education for children.

Others suggest that charter schools are also different in that parents have a strong voice in selecting them. However, as Smith, Wohlstetter, Kuzin, and De Pedro (2011) remind us, parent involvement in charter schools reflects a different kind of participation, although it might need innovative strategies to fully engage parents in school-related decisions. Similarly, it is argued that parent participation might vary depending on parents' background, including socioeconomic. For instance, Mavrogordato and Stein (2016) affirm that while Latino student participation has grown in recent years, their

parents continue to face challenges, such as cultural, linguistic, and economic difficulties, as they attempt to enter the educational marketplace context. On the other hand, Altenhofen, Berends, and White (2016) assert that charter schools also attract suburban, high-income parents, who consider social networks, effective teachers, distance to school, and academic quality as characteristics that influence their selection of charter schools.

Another characteristic relates to admissions as part of the focal point of school choice enrollment processes. Charter schools create a public lottery system to allow interested applicants to submit their names as part of a random selection through a physical contraption or randomized computer program (Chew, 2019). In retrospect, public charter school lotteries may not follow the need for equality for all. For many charter school systems, a weighted lottery is a mechanism to ensure that schools can meet the legal requirements found in specific enrollment preferences for groups of applicants (e.g., geographic proximity, race, siblings, school founders, etc.) (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, n.d.).

Furthermore, charter schools have become the principal means for introducing various options and competition into the structure of publicly supported K-12 education. Such innovation is another distinguishing characteristic of these schools intended to increase the flexibility and autonomy available to charter school leaders and staff. However, the freedom available to charter schools varies considerably, with some states providing broad waivers for all charter schools and others offering limited exemptions based on specific requests (Bulkley, 2011).

Most recently, in a 2019 Condition of Education Report, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2019) used quantitative techniques to analyze two significant characteristics regarding traditional and charter schools when exploring the public education landscape over the past two decades: the concentration of student racial and ethnic composition and socioeconomic status. When examining the racial and ethnic engagement between the two public schools, reviewing the most current data is essential. For instance, the NCES study stated that in 2016-2017, 57% of traditional public schools had a student body of 50% or more White students, 9% had an enrollment of 50% or more Black students, and 16% contained 50% Hispanic enrollment. The most substantial change in racial and ethnic makeup between the three largest racial groups from 2000-01 to 2016-17 is the increase of 7% Hispanic students. Conversely, white student enrollment decreased by 14%, and Black student enrollment dropped by 2%. The data also describe the enrollment trend for public charter schools. The data show rates decreasing for both 50% or more White and Black students in charter schools during that same period. In contrast, charter schools with more than 50% Hispanic students grew significantly from 11 to 26%, a 15% increase.

The National Center of Education Statistics' data also showed that many charter schools are in urban areas. In one decade, from 2006 to 2016, there was a 4 percent increase in urban charter schools, where primarily low-income students enrolled (2018). Statistics also demonstrate that the number of low-income students doubled in sixteen years, from 2000 to 2016. Bulkley (2011) believes that school choice provides better

educational opportunities for low-income students, allowing for innovative academic, social and fiscal practices. He adds that advocates state that charter schools feel pressured to perform at high academic levels due to renewable contracts and competition among other charter schools. On the other hand, critics of the charter school concept also express concerns associated with charter schools' actual contributions.

Charter school debate. While public charter schools have expanded and appear to provide better education, there is an ongoing debate between advocates and critics of this school choice model. Advocates suggest an enhanced trust by parents in the educational process, regardless of whether they have actual data or evidence to prove the perception (Sosniak & Ethington, 1992). Groups in favor of charter schools argue that it makes the entire public school system more effective by mandating accountability for their stakeholders, including parents (Chubb & Moe, 1990). According to Quinn and Ogburn (2020), Fred Harris, an advocate for the district's movement toward portfolio management, believes that competition and choice are the best options for families.

If you inform parents of what their options are . . . they'll choose the best-performing option for their student, is my sole belief. And by allowing them to cluster students into the best-performing schools, you eliminate the lower-performing schools, and you bring attention to highlight the fact that you have parents opting into something better (p. 155).

Harris believes that this will create competition for enrollment when giving parents school choice and that the best schools will excel, thereby eradicating the lower performing schools.

Advocates of market-based approaches in education reform attest that generating a need for educational services will create competition among educational entities and heighten the demand for better services at the exact cost as traditional public schools (Molnar & Garcia, 2007). Previous research suggests that advocates recognize that charter schools serve a diverse student population and attract minority parents. According to Goldhaber (1999), families living in more racially/ethnically and economically diverse areas are more likely to participate in charter schools. According to the 2015 National Assessment of Educational Progress, all students, regardless of socioeconomic status, increase academic performance and other peers due to integration (Schneider et al., 2015). Adding to that, Kurlaender and Yun (2007) denote that students raise their expressive language, leadership skills, college attendance, self-confidence, and critical and creative thinking abilities. Charter advocates suggest that traditional public school systems are inconsistent in turnaround low-performing schools (CED, 2018). Thus, students fail in a system with harsh state and local rules that prevent schools from making needed changes. Advocates believe that fewer regulations and less “red tape” allow charter schools to improve student outcomes and provide a vision for additional resources and meaningful activities.

Proponents also maintain that school choice will increase student achievement and create competition between schools to improve the overall educational landscape.

However, this investment would impact a parent's ability to make decisions that would benefit their children. As a result, parents remain central to charter schools today. For example, the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (2020), one of the most prominent charter school advocacy organizations, argues that charter schools offer families options in education, allowing them to take an active role in their child's education. On the other hand, several researchers report concerns about charter schools' actual contributions to enhance education quality. Some areas of concern include selecting students, the application process, student population diversity, and parent access to charter schools' information.

Critics have also dubbed the charter school systemic enrollment process steps the "Dirty Dozen" (Welner, 2013), implying that the institutions have created an oppressive culture. The observations described include a lengthy application (available just a few hours) printed in English only, a selection process that requests long student and parent essays, and mandatory family interviews. There are accusations of some charters in higher socioeconomic areas encouraging "undesirable" students to withdraw, refusing to serve students with special needs, and using harsh disciplinary actions. Critics have also pointed out that charter schools have requested documents that federal law cannot require as part of the application process, such as social security cards, birth certificates, documentation of disabilities, academic prerequisites, and previous assessment exams (Brown, 2013). As a result, those who are against these schools define charter school

reform efforts as the division of parents and communities of color from majority parents (Ravitch, 2013).

Bifulco and Bulkley (2018) note that charter schools go against the public interest of diversity by segregating a district's racial makeup and its schools. This longitudinal study suggest that some White students transfer to charter schools that are less racially diverse than their assigned schools. Similarly, Black students tend to choose charters that enroll proportionally more Black students than their traditional schools. The study also found that in Milwaukee, Little Rock and Chicago, heavy minority school districts could reduce racial segregation by giving Black families more school choice options.

Others examined the relationship between choice and race in recent decades, highlighting the beginning of schools' resegregation in the 2000s. According to researchers, such resegregation can potentially harm students' outcomes (Clotfelter, 2001; Orfield, 2001; Roscigno, 2000). Similarly, studies about racial distribution in these schools (Peterson et al., 2002; Schneider et al., 2000) suggest that most studies are limited to local and regional data but may have a broader implication on schools' racial distributions. Those opposed to the school choice movement also argue that parents do not have sufficient access to resources to form realistic expectations or choose quality schools. The school choice movement "assumes that all parents are knowledgeable of their choices and fully capable of acting in their child's best interests" (Saltman, 2000, p. 24).

A previous study by Berliner and Biddle (1995) found that critics claim low-income parents choose schools based on convenience rather than on the school's quality while not always providing evidence to support these claims. The authors suggest that school choice policies benefit the middle to higher classes because they can navigate resources sufficiently, increasing the gap between the "haves" and "have nots."

Opponents also claim that the school choice option for open enrollment would impact socioeconomic segregation in many neighborhoods, leading to families' segregation by income and education (Lauen, 2007).

Parents initially seem eager to have an opportunity to choose the best school for their children, believing the structure promotes efficiency; however, it appears that the charter system often fails to deliver equity in education. Opponents of charter schools consider these institutions a breeding ground for injustice for students. While charter schools' design appears to improve structural efficiency, many question the implementation and execution of instructional practices. Similarly, researchers observe that there are other conflicting perspectives on the charter school movement. For instance, Cullen et al. (2005) studied student achievement on students who took advantage of open enrollment in Chicago Public Schools and found that they graduated at a higher rate than those who remained in their assigned schools. Hoxby, Murarka, and Kang (2009) estimate correlations between charter schools' policies and their effects on achievement (2006), questioning whether charter schools' growing attraction is due to its overall qualities, or not, compared to traditional public school achievements.

Therefore, scholars claim no consensus about whether charter schools lead to improved student outcomes or are the best educational option to ensure students' academic success and how stakeholders are involved.

Stakeholders involvement in charter schools. It has been noted that stakeholders such as teachers, principals, parents and others may have strong opinions and may play critical roles in charter schools. According to a 2014 study by Public Agenda and the Kettering Foundation, roughly nine out of ten educators felt that involving educational stakeholders in the issues facing K-12 education could assist in the schools' progress. These educators described stakeholders as members shaped by families, neighborhoods, communities, politics, economics and cultures. Hardaway (2018) asserts that many educational stakeholders within the district agree that action needs to occur. School choice can be a platform for partnerships to ensure district accountability by reevaluating its practices and striving for the best access to education for all students.

Teachers may be driving stakeholders in a school community because they can impact organizational performance over time (First, 2009). Due to the teaching profession's staff attrition and shifting priorities, any school community needs to involve its external members to sustain positive student outcomes.

School leaders are essential stakeholders within the school community. They are often seen as wanting precise data and information regarding students' performance, continuous improvement in their schools' operations and culture (O'Keefe et al., 2019).

School leaders are interested in district/system expectations and goals, strengths and weaknesses across various outcomes, and proactively combating potential problems in a school performance framework. As stakeholders, school leaders' contributions include allocating resources, hiring faculty and staff, and making programmatic decision-making to achieve a high-functioning school environment for the entire school community. Yet, in the scholarship of Isola and Cummins (2019), Jackson and Kohli (2016), and Valenzuela (2016), a school staff that has like-minded stakeholders are intentional to enact the educational change they are likely to create a teaching and learning environment that can champion the relationship between school and the community. A school staff that draws upon their own experiences and share multicultural competencies via their professional journey can cultivate a school community that fosters an invigorated academic achievement and embraces their cultural identity.

Another group of stakeholders that play a critical role in the selection of charter schools are parents. Zeelandelaar and Winkler (2013) found that 1) 36 percent of parents wanted vocational classes or job-related programs, 2) 24 percent of parents preferred civic engagement and leadership emphasis in schools, 3) 23 percent of parents were interested in a high-performing campus where their students could be involved in high expectations, 4) parents suggested that their children would learn from a community of diverse learners, and 5) parents valued a school with arts and music instruction (15%) and acceptance to a top-tier college (12%) in the teen percentages.

Parents, as stakeholders, contribute to their children's educational success as previous research suggests (Weisz, 1990); there appears to be a correlation between parental engagement and academic success. Students whose parents are engaged in their child's education benefit better than those whose parents are passively involved. Furthermore, as stakeholders, parents participate in teacher conferences, phone calls, and read and sign messages from school; their children tend to be more academically successful than children whose parents do not engage with the school community. Also, it has been asserted that children experience success when parents assist with homework, attendance and volunteering in school events.

Various state laws are intended to foster higher levels of parental involvement as essential stakeholders but do not specifically differentiate parents' perspectives whose children attend urban and low-socioeconomic areas. Understanding such differentiation is vital since suburban and urban parents may differ in how they decide to enroll their children in charter schools and what factors are considered when selecting a charter school (Altenhofen, Berends, & White, 2016; Smith & Wohlstetter, 2009). Others explain that parents' decisions may differ according to socioeconomic status, and how middle-class parents see charter schools is not similar to how low-income parents perceive them (Rhodes & Deluca, 2014).

According to researchers, when parents consider charter schools an educational choice, race, racial or ethnic preference is not a determinant in selecting a public charter school. For instance, Weiher and Tedin (2002) discovered that certain ethnic groups were

more likely to transfer their children to schools where more students had similar cultural backgrounds. In this empirical study, parents prioritized essential considerations making their school choices from a list that included six options: test scores, discipline, school racial or ethnic characteristics, location, the teaching of moral values, and safety. These researchers found that parents do not necessarily select schools where their children are predominantly of the same racial or ethnic group. Schneider et al., (1998) also obtained similar results. In both studies, parents did not refer to the school's social, racial or ethnic characteristics as crucial, thus minimizing this factor for further analysis.

Orfield (2001) suggests that most parents believe school should be where students interact with other students of different backgrounds and cultures and prefer to send their children to a diverse, integrated school to explore other cultures. Henig's research has openly questioned studies on parents' school choices and their ethnic and racial implications. The author stressed that the link between respondents' inclinations and actual racial and ethnic tendencies in school choices was relatively weak (1994). Consequently, the selection of charter schools can be influenced by other factors that seem to support the benefits of charter schools.

Factors Involved in Charter School Selection

The literature on the selection of charter schools reveals many factors that have been recognized as influential and are reported in extensive lists of various aspects. For instance, Delaney (2007) conducted a quantitative survey focused on White and minority parents' perceptions of what factors they chose when selecting a school. This study

highlights the liberal progressive aspects of schooling, race and core academics. Another survey of factors by Mawene and Ball (2018), that are heavily considered and influenced parents' selection of schools, is structural factors, process-related factors, familial factors, and children-related factors. However, it is essential to note that most reported factors are dependent on the study's nature and focus and are multifaceted. Thus, the following grouping represents the most prominent factors: cultural appreciation, a kaleidoscope of school-related features, and social considerations.

Cultural appreciation. Parents are attracted to learning environments that are open-minded and readily available to respond to stakeholders' diverse bodies. According to a study by Chang et al. (2012), parents indicated the determining factors in school choices included cultural appreciation and a positive learning environment. Chang highlights how these stakeholders may differ significantly from school personnel in terms of social class, race, ethnicity and language. The study found that to be attracted to parents, the entire school community must provide a safe and friendly environment while respecting parents' and students' culture and privacy.

In an empirical study of sixteen parents, Beabout and Cambre (2013) found that parents appreciated the community-oriented focus that new students received during the school introduction. During a parent interview, one parent commented that her son “was able to attend [a] summer camp, where he got to meet some of the kids that also attended [his] school ... So he already had a rapport with some of the kids.” The individual's strategic attention allowed for children's social needs to be addressed, unlike traditional

school options. Another parent reported how “[the principal] goes out of her way to make sure every kid gets what they need.” Parents want schools that prioritize their children’s social and academic needs.

Zeelandelaar and Winkler (2013) also focused on how schools of choice, like charter schools, meet different student populations’ cultural and educational needs. The authors point out that school districts, policymakers, and charter schools need to develop school choices that serve families with varied interests. When schools attempt to offer a diversified portfolio while respecting the fundamentals, school systems can better provide options that meet student needs. This diversification strategy gives reliable and supporting resources that enhance the school’s ability to meet its community’s needs. Drawing parallels between parents’ options and customization, school leaders should reflect on which parent and students they could better serve. The study also suggests that diverse school designs can bring sustainability and provide a competitive advantage in education.

Although the literature regarding racial and ethnic background suggests that culture and race might affect parent choice and participation, previous studies provide limited attention to the specific races and ethnicities, including Latino parents when making selection decisions. Charter schools, in particular, are the fastest-growing school choice option for Latino parents and, given the increase in Latino parents’ interest in charter schools, this group of parents merits further attention and future exploration.

School-related factors. Several studies emphasize that the relationship between parent engagement and student achievement allows for a stronger partnership between parents and schools (Carter, 2007; Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 1995; Lewis, 1997; Murnane & Levy, 1996). As a result, parents are better positioned to consider school-related aspects to select a charter school. The most prominent factors relate to the learning environment, curricular foundation, school safety over innovations, and small class size.

First, a learning environment is essential to foster a positive experience for students in charter schools. As Rofes and Stulberg (2004) observed, the learning atmosphere in charter schools in urban areas provides flexibility for creating a vision and mission to meet the student populations' specific needs and the neighborhoods in which they serve. The study notes several examples of parents opting for schools that do not follow the "one size fits all" model, such as a school focused on emergent bilinguals, entrepreneurial skills, or college preparatory themes.

A vital research strand by Hanushek et al. (2007) suggests in their findings that charter school achievement in mathematics and reading did not differ significantly from that in regular public schools. Bifulco and Ladd's (2006) study found that students made considerably fewer achievement gains in charter schools than in public schools. In adding to the research, Friedman (2002) proposes that if parents could choose between multiple schools for their children, the educational institution would be invigorated to improve its performance. When school choice encourages a better learning environment for students,

competition enhances the public school system. Schools then strive toward excellence through competition, motivating students to apply for a spot in local charter schools.

Second, the curriculum is the most prominent factor considered when selecting a charter school that relates to the fundamental core of schooling. As Zeehandelaar and Winkler (2013) reported, parents emphasized a robust curricular foundation in reading and math, along with specialization in STEM subjects. The study also found that parents were interested in a curriculum foundation that incorporated good study habits, critical thinking skills, and verbal and written communication skills. This research found that parents of various races, incomes and political ideologies share curricular preferences. Kleitz et al. (2000) also found that parents consider curricular academic quality as the primary determinant in selecting a school for their children, regardless of race and ethnicity.

Testing appears to be another aspect related to curriculum quality. Hastings and Weinstein (2008) suggest that testing accountability, when choosing a school for their children, is a concern for parents. This experimental study provides evidence that parents who had test score information were likely to select higher academic achievement schools for their children. Also, accessing student achievement scores increased the probability that a parent would choose a setting with a significantly higher proportion of like-minded parents seeking a similar higher-achieving school for their children. As the curriculum is considered an influential factor, Zernike's (2000) study found that some parents were concerned about their children's academic outcomes, including SAT

preparation and college readiness, as these practices reflect inflexible accountability expectations. As a result, focusing on these expectations might hinder a charter school's ability to go beyond test preparation and provide innovative platforms for the students they serve.

Third, while the selection of a charter school depends on curricular aspects and academic quality, parents have concern for their children's safety. As a result, they consider safety an essential factor and, at times, struggle to make a decision. As Fuller (2000) affirms, there appears to be an ongoing struggle of some groups of parents, namely African Americans, who wish to exercise their power to enact educational choices. Others (Buckley & Schneider, 2009) note that parents tend to choose traditional school safety and academic achievement over innovation. Following school location and a heterogeneous student body composition, parents seek a school with the best design and unique curriculum structures. Teske et al. (2000) suggest that although schools attempt to attract parents through a promise of innovation and change, many parents emphasize student safety structures and a traditional curriculum, thus becoming "savvy choosers." It is also reported that parents most often see school safety as an essential factor of school choice. According to Schneider et al. (2000), the importance of school safety may vary by Socio-Economic Status (SES). Many African American parents seem to be concerned about the students' physical safety assigned to their neighborhood school (Pedroni, 2007). Parents perceive that disciplinary practices used for managing school orders are often at the expense of teaching and learning. In Pedroni's report, a parent states:

[The school had] more security than the police department. And the police were always there, and whatever a student did, “You’re going home!” So they would do stuff so they could go home! If they breathe hard, they’re sending them home (p. 99).

Safety is also connected to school discipline practices. According to Altenhofen, Berends, and White (2016), some schools and state institutions make disciplinary data accessible to the parents to see the school's disciplinary practices. Mavrogordato and Stein’s (2016) research found that discipline and safety determined school choice for Latino and non-Latino parents in addition to academics, discipline and security. The parents communicated a need for a secure learning environment that included discipline and safety as part of the school culture. The study found very few differences between the primary concerns of Latino and non-Latino parents. One Latino parent commented on her motives in choosing a school, saying, “because of the way that students are disciplined there are few students in the classroom [and the] fewer children in the class, the more the children learn” (Latino Parent [L] 6).

Fourth, small class size is a factor for selecting a charter school. Parents view charter schools as a promising option to educate their children, and class size is seen as another factor influencing their decision. The study by Pedroni (2007) on parental factors regarding school choice shows that class size is highlighted as essential and has additional benefits. Parents perceive small classes as providing more individualized instructional opportunities for their children and believe that teachers are more responsive

to their children's academic progress due to smaller class sizes, making the necessary adjustments to prepare students for college and university. One parent, in Pedroni's study, states:

The classes are smaller, giving teachers more time to work with children individually and help them more. The class size is very important to me because I know the child could have more hand-on-hand teaching with the teacher, or the specialist in the classroom could work with them individually on [their] activities (p. 114).

Additionally, Beabout and Cambre (2013) found that choosing a school included school size and staff-student ratio, contributing to stronger student-student relationships. Evidence showed that school size and class size were a priority for families when enrolling in a New Orleans school. Many parents expressed their appreciation of the "one-on-one" time that the school provided. One parent noted that "in a smaller class, kids learn more than [in] a crowded class," which directly impacted her decision to enroll him in a non-traditional school. Beabout reported a parent saying that her son's teacher faced an uphill battle with a classroom containing over twenty-five students. Another commented, "the class size was not working" for her son at the public school and cited smaller class sizes as a reason for moving to a school with fewer students. This case study suggests that a small class size was an overall draw to non-traditional schooling options.

Parental factors. It is clear from the extant research that several factors are related to charter schools' considerations of high student achievement and academic aspects for the most part. However, certain factors associated with parents themselves also influence the selection process. As researchers indicate, parental factors involvement includes role construction and self-efficacy (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Parental role construction occurs when parents are engaged and responsible for their children's learning outcomes. Parents use their prior individual experiences and are influenced by other parents in their social group. Parental construction may change depending on one's own experience over time. This change of ideology or experience may modify parental decision-making and may differ from their social group's expectations.

Similarly, focusing on parents' perceptions, Bartram (2006) found that parents often mentioned their personal and educational experiences and social networks when making enrollment decisions for their children. Parents emphasized their roles while deciding what they wanted in their children's education. Additionally, several parents believed they should become advocates for their children since, in their experience, no one had advocated for them. Bartram called this phenomenon a parent expressing "educational regrets" (2006, p. 211).

Blackwell's (2016) research on alternate enrollment indicates that lower registration, personalization, academic focus, and inclusion opportunities for children with disabilities are other reasons parents choose charter schools as an alternative to traditional public schools. It also appears from previous research that a parent's socio-

economic status affects selection decisions. Villavicencio (2013) found some differences between economic groups regarding whether they remain in a particular charter school. Lower-income families are less likely to leave school once they have made their decision. On the other hand, families with higher incomes tend to transfer when not satisfied within the first year of enrollment. These actions suggest that parents might have different social and personal motives or options regarding their children's schooling.

Social factors. Social considerations are also referred to as factors that affect the selection of a charter school. These may include networks between parents and schools, other individuals as informants, certain publications, relationships with school staff, or other social sources, and may offer particular advantages. For instance, parents' social networks are essential sources of information for their decision-making process (Bell, 2007; Neild, 2005; Schneider, 2001). Neild (2005) noted that, at times, schools' lack of quality information forced parents to use social network informants to assist in school choice decisions. Even when two different sets of parents from the same socioeconomic class received specific information, their decisions were based on the network's knowledge. However, Schneider (2001) found that parents with high educational attainment relied on fewer published resources to make school choices, often relying on social informants to gather this information. "In short, highly educated parents find social networks particularly useful and do not need to search widely, whereas less-educated parents do not have such rich networks of information" (Schneider, 2001, p. 78).

Research by Bryk et al. (1993) confirmed how crucial it is for schools to develop relationships with parents; they navigate their children's external school behaviors by building common bonds. Schools function best when there is a culture of strong relationships between all stakeholders and the consistency of high expectations for the entire learning community. Carmona et al. (2020) also emphasize the power of relationships between parental involvement and schools. Parents can add value to the educational landscape by joining associations, organizing school functions, and participating in learning activities. In addition, schools can genuinely benefit from parents' willingness to support the school's vision and plan.

Noguera and Pierce's (2016) empirical study provides an example of parents and community members joining forces to establish comprehensive support and equitable admissions, advancing the goal of assistance to families to access exceptional schools in New York City. Advocates sought to improve students' offerings by creating schools across the district that offered dual language, magnet, science, technology engineering, and math (known as "STEM") programs. New York City sought to provide the neediest students and their parents with quality school choices that lead to high-quality education and diversified school communities.

Researchers also advance the notion that selecting a charter school is a social affair and includes family members. Bell et al. (2014) researched the dynamics of both parent and children decision-making among 15 families. This study found that the immediate family was part of the decision-making process in all circumstances, and the

majority of the children made the final decision on the school; however, family members served as a network of support in the discussion. Families indicated that they received multiple resources while choosing a school that included information disseminated by the school district, local newspapers, principal presentations, and meetings with teachers and school guidance counselors.

In a study of parents who selected non-traditional public schools, Yang and Kayaardi (2004) found specific determinants that influenced a parent's school choice decision. The study found that demographics, socioeconomic status, and family structure also affected the selection. Of significance was the finding that socioeconomic class differences were more notable than racial differentials in school choice. This finding was a significant concern because of the possible increase in economic segregation due to school choice, explaining why parents choose non-public schools. This finding may also shed light on other factors that may influence parental school choice.

While many minority students in urban schools depend on school choice to enroll in quality schools (Rasell & Rothstein, 1993), some question whether families with less education and lower income would see charter schools as an opportunity for institutional access. Rasell and Rothstein conclude that many disadvantaged families do not possess the ability to navigate the resources to their advantage. Family advocates say that some families would have access to only a few good schools (Lee et al., 1994). Schneider et al. (1996) acknowledge that parents with the least education have access to fewer resources,

are disadvantaged by race and ethnicity, and reside in large urban districts. Consequently, they are less likely to be advocates for their children.

As schools attempt to connect with parents and provide social opportunities to build better relationships, they often find themselves addressing the differences in student levels of educational attainment and their social and cultural backgrounds and family incomes (Smit et al., 2007). According to Smit et al.'s study, parents with a higher education level tend to place importance on their children's independence. In contrast, parents with less educational attainment tend to focus on the need for their children to be obedient, respectful, and follow school rules and policies. Thus, as explained in the parental factors, it is critical to explore parent engagement.

Parent Engagement in Charter Schools

Parents' perspectives in schools have evolved and continue to be essential to ensure students' success. More recent views consider parent engagement a higher form of commitment to act in favor of their children. As such, parent engagement in charter schools promotes parent voices when selecting schools. Researchers note that parent engagement can encourage the active search of information and resources (Kimelberg, 2014; Posey-Maddox, 2014). Studies reveal that parents with similar values and goals regarding school reform, fundraising, programs, and staffing tend to volunteer and take on leadership roles within the school community, thus enhancing their connections with other parents and the school (Epstein, 1995; Posey-Maddox, 2014).

For most of the past three decades, many parents have taken on a significant role in researching schools, learning firsthand from others, and comparing and analyzing the school that is the best fit for their children (Ulpindo, 2008). In a study headed by the Center on Reinventing Public Education at the University of Washington (2007), researchers conducted 800 telephone interviews with parents across three cities: Washington, DC, Milwaukee, and Denver. The study found that in terms of concrete choice information retrieval activities, 85% of parents visited the school, 77% talked to administrators, 76% talked to teachers, 73% looked at printed information, 68% spoke to family and friends, and 74% of children visited the school. This study also found that verbal communication and site visits were the most critical mechanism for parents to gather information. Others found that parents use information commonly posted by many districts and schools through various avenues. Some examples include report cards, websites, school fairs, and other options, allowing them to make reasonably well-informed choices (Buckley & Schneider, 2003; Chubb & Moe, 1990).

Bolivar and Crispeels (2011) associate parental engagement with parent participation in school leadership, decision-making teams, and advisory boards. However, there is much debate on whether parents can be responsible for decision-makers when choosing quality schools (Holmes-Erickson, 2017). The theory behind school choice is that parents obtain information and resources then decide on the school that best fits their children's interests. For the school choice process to be effective, parents must be able to be part of the selection; if not, there is no validity to the choice.

Therefore, some question the resources that parents use to decide when selecting a particular school or whether parents even know how to choose quality schools. Assuming parents know what they want and how to evaluate the desired school, they can then adequately make an informed decision.

When parents become engaged in decision-making in the charter school market, they learn how to navigate the arena just as one would navigate the housing markets (Buckley & Schneider, 2003). Unfortunately, information regarding schools' quality and reliability is often less consistent and dependent on third-party information (Buckley & Schneider, 2007). Schneider, Teske, Marschall, and Roch (1998) suggest that parent engagement is facilitated by having the background information necessary to find schools that meet their children's needs. According to the authors, parents make decisions based on their children's learning levels, how they learn, and what motivates them. The literature highlights how parents can connect students to the best schools to increase their chances for academic success. The authors also propose having a variety of school choices, allowing parents to be more selective, thus creating the ability to "shop around." As parents engage in decision-making to select a school for their children, Blackwell (2016) recommends that parents examine staff qualifications, services provided by the school, learning environment, behavioral policies, and the schools' partnerships with local traditional public schools.

Parental engagement in charter schools appears to reflect specific aims. For instance, Cavanaugh (2012) describes three primary goals for parental empowerment

called the parental “trigger” in the form of laws that enable parents to intervene in their children’s school if they perform poorly. The goals are to provide enhanced parental empowerment, challenge bureaucracy in education reform, and increase school choice options. Parental trigger laws have gained support from parent unions, politicians, and philanthropists, such as the Sam Walton Foundation and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

Parent Revolution, a grassroots parent union, is a proponent for school leadership and facilitates laws that prevent reform processes from expanding school choice. The organization believes that its support of school advocacy laws will produce more reliable academic student outcomes and a much-needed change in educational bureaucracy. Cavanaugh also suggests that although these laws initially give voice and engagement to the reform process, parental “cycling” can lead to parents becoming frustrated when they do not see immediate results. Although “cycling” can move policy, ultimately, this brings unwanted effects for struggling schools.

Further, parents may engage in their children’s education in charter schools in various forms that allow them to better understand the benefits and requirements of enrolling their children. These may include but are too limited to parents’ networks, healthy relationships with the schools (Bryk et al., 1993), accessing relevant information, reviewing school-related achievement data, and decision-making.

Parental engagement plays a unique role in education and is expanding to include decision-making. According to Yang and Kayaardi (2004), there are six critical areas

regarding parental decision-making. These may include but are not limited to collaboration, policy implications, the network between parents and schools, student outcomes, school improvement, racial and social inequalities, and familial factors to school choice. While it is apparent that parent engagement in charter schools has expanded in form, depth, and scope, it should also be noted that parents' social and cultural backgrounds might determine the forms and levels of engagement. However, research does not often account for differences in engagement by culture or ethnic background, such as Latino parents.

Latino Parent Decision-Making

Demographic changes are evident and have influenced the selection of public charter schools. According to Humes, Jones, and Ramirez (2011), racial, ethnicity, and linguistic diversity has increased in United States demographics. This data has diversified dramatically due to the Latino population's continuous growth, from 22.4 million in 1990 to 50.5 million in 2010, more than double.

Currently the fastest-growing racial subgroup in the United States, Hispanics now make up 17 percent of the nation's population (NCES, 2016). One in three Hispanics in the United States today are of school age; their presence is evident in public schools (Pew Research, 2014). Also, an estimated one-quarter of all public school students in 2014 identified as Hispanic – the prediction is that that number will grow to about 30 percent by 2025 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016).

Similarly, with the increase of Latino students in our public schools, their academic performance has become a national concern. Within the last two decades, federal legislation such as NCLB has encouraged states and school districts to focus on Latino students. Due to The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB, 2002), Hispanic students have become a subgroup of accountability for districts in the subject areas of reading, math, and science. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) data demonstrates a disparity gap between Latino and non-Hispanic White students on reading and math assessments (Gándara and Contreras, 2009). Studies authored by Fry (2003), Gándara and Contreras (2009), and Orfield et al. (2004) have also found a concerning trend of Latinos having significantly lower grade point averages, higher drop-out rates, and reduced college completion rates.

While the literature suggests an increase in demographics of charter school enrollments and an increase of interest by Latino parents, this group has not received the same attention from researchers. Recent studies have attempted to examine which considerations are used by Latino parents when deciding on their children's education options. For instance, Mavorgordado and Stein (2016) have examined how Latino parents engage in the educational marketplace to explore school choice options. Research has illuminated Latino parents' perspectives in four areas: personal values, interest in better education, cultural considerations, and accessibility of information.

Personal values. Learning what matters most for Latinos can help scholars better understand what influences their decision-making when selecting a school for their

children. Latino parents' emphasis on personal and cultural values is a generational experience focused on familismo and, as a unit, it has overcome language loss, acculturation level, migration patterns, and immigrant/citizen status (Marin, 1993; Marín & Marín, 1991; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009). Scholars have defined familismo as an essential cultural value that focuses on the collective instead of the individual (Consoli & Llamas, 2013; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009; Smith-Morris et al., 2012). Many Latinos' upbringing include placing the family's needs and the extended family above one's individual needs. Halgunseth et al. (2006) studied Latino parenting and found that the essential goals of familismo, respeto, and educación were common in all Latino subgroups, impacting parental decisions and practices with their children.

Valenzuela (1999) noted that “educación” is another unwavering child-rearing goal described by researchers in previous Latino parenting literature. The term “educación” is more comprehensive than its English cognate, “education,” in which moral, interpersonal, and academic goals are not autonomous but intimately linked. Similarly, Goldenberg and Gallimore (1995) reported that the education definitions of Latino parents were not exclusively about academics but encompassed morality, proper behavior, good manners, and respect for elders. A more recent study of fifty-five Latino parents, conducted by Ryan and Gonzalez (2016), found that several education trends were valued, including after-school programs, high-quality teachers, college preparatory courses, the inclusion of a Latino staff, linguistic sensitivity in and around campuses, and

personalized learning. Another priority for parents is the importance of authentic cultural awareness and current and relevant communication.

The literature suggests that parents may include both fathers and mothers. Gaitan (2004) discovered that Latina mothers are invested in their children's education and seek various strategies and resources to ensure academic success. The scholarship highlights that a mother's beliefs and actions are grounded in the values of "familismo" and "educación." Thus, schools need to build on maternal insights, practices, and knowledge about the students they serve. Schools and practitioners can enhance Latino parental involvement by valuing the role of the family in the decision-making process. Not surprisingly, the study also found that high familial participation anchors high-achieving Latino students at home and school. A school's need to connect with parents must require understanding others' cultural beliefs and values for educators (Villenas 2005). Therefore, schools need to promote opportunities and spaces for the Latino voice to be heard and ensure "resituating the dynamics of power and privilege" (p. 276) by better understanding a parent's interest in attaining the best education for their children.

Interest in better education. For generations, Latino families have not had the same access to education as other families. Some of the critical challenges Latino parents face are the lack of access to information, language barriers, hesitation in assimilating to another culture, and immigration status problems. However, a change in perspective by newer generations of Latinos and first-generation college graduates, with the desire to participate in the educational system, are contributing to our nation's academic and social

structures. According to Kleitz et al. (2000), Latino parents are interested in a better education for their children; their research confirmed that Latino parents value “education quality” and class size when choosing a charter school, the same as their Anglo peers.

A study by Schneider, Teske and Marschall (2002) discovered that Latino parents, similar to their White peers, felt it was essential for their children to obtain high scores. Other researchers suggest that Latino and White parents do not differ in prioritizing the importance of academics. Further, Latino parents’ secondary consideration is safety, discipline, location of the charter, and schools’ internal and external relationships. Many Latino parents deal with barriers that often impact their school choice, and their considerations often demonstrate a balance between academic and non-academic social factors (Kleitz et al., 2000; Schneider et al., 2002; Taylor Haynes et al., 2010).

The National Council of La Raza supports Latino parents' interest in better education for their children and prioritizes educational achievement and higher education for more Hispanics (Gross, 2014). This practice has prompted college readiness that aligns with many charter schools serving minority and low-income communities. In a study of low-income students, 90 percent of the charter schools they attended focused on a rigorous college-ready curriculum and valued a culture of higher education. Many first-generation college students are enrolling in these charter schools, so it is essential to add the necessary resources to support those wanting to persist and graduate from college. The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (2016) in the United States reports that

30 percent of all charter schools have prioritized college readiness when creating their campuses' academic goals.

The Center for Education Reform (2014) reported that many Hispanic parents entrusted their child's education to a charter school, and, most recently, data has informed us that charter schools are generating positive outcomes for Hispanic students. A 2015 study by Stanford University's Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO) found that Hispanic students in urban charter schools were provided twenty-two extra days of math and six extra days of reading. In addition, the study proclaimed that Hispanic Charter school enrollees living in poverty received a total of forty-eight extra days in math and twenty-five additional days in reading instruction. The group that benefited the most from having extended instruction days in reading and math were English Learners (EL). Emergent Bilinguals also gained seventy-two extra days of math and seventy-nine additional days of reading instruction while enrolled in charter schools, obtaining math levels similar to their white non-EL peers (CREDO, 2015).

Cultural considerations. When focusing on Latino parents as a subgroup, one must take an in-depth look at the people's cultural background to gain perspective. Falicov (2005) examined the socialization between Latino parents, their children, and their relationship to "familismo" values, which can sometimes bring conflict and disruption to the family if children and parents acculturate at different rates. The scholarship found that Latino parents value longer interdependence between mothers and

children and take a more laissez-faire attitude toward their children's early self-reliance skills than many in Euro-American families.

Recently, Mavrogordato and Stein (2016) identified that Latino parental engagement in their child's school is often incumbent with their linguistic and cultural barriers. These obstacles may also be contingent on the lack of parent engagement in a system of school choice. In a similar study, Oakes and Lipton (2006) and Valdés (1996) suggest that language barriers can make it difficult for parents to communicate effectively with teachers, administrators and school staff. In a school choice system, parents may face obstacles due to language accessing more traditional resources and schooling options for their children. The researchers explain that most of the state department of education websites and school report card documents are often not conducive to non-English speakers. Many Latino parents will then defer to their social connections for informal information and resources.

Pushor (2010) observed that changing practices when serving Latino families is essential. Schools should practice cultural sensitivity when addressing families' diverse experiences. Pushor also stated that schools are not taking risks to "interrupt the hierarchical and unidirectional school structures which continue to silence and marginalize parents and families" (p. 14). These scholars argue that understanding Latino families is crucial to disassembling misconceptions of Latino families and their involvement.

Accessibility to Information. The power of knowledge and access to information is critical for Latino parents when selecting a charter school. As they navigate the school choice context, which does not always accommodate their circumstances, Latino parents tend to experience difficulties when seeking information, such as cultural, language, and technology access barriers. As a result, there is a challenge to objectively or accurately obtain information regarding school choices (Kisida & Wolf, 2010; Schneider et al., 1998). Teske (2012) also suggests that for many low-income and minority parents, the process of learning about schools lacks accessibility to social networks or resourceful information. Even with limited access regarding the best school choice option that meets the need of their children, families use “heuristics” for them to have “enough” information to ensure they are making the best choice (Schneider et al., 1999).

Garcia and Morales (2016) found that access to charter school information was an obstacle for families. The absence of information regarding charter school vision and operational processes influenced Latino students' parental decision-making and enrollment trends. The study proposed a need for intentionality from outreach and recruitment to effectively determine the best way of sharing information via individual contacts between school officials and parents. Lareau and Goyette (2014) found that urban parents are likely to rely on the Internet and other sources as determinants of school choice preferences. There is also evidence to suggest that Latino parents may gather and use information about schools differently. Henig (1996) found that, although unfamiliar with some of the technical terms of school choice, Hispanic parents often

referenced mass media sources (e.g., radio, TV, newspapers) for school choice information. Schneider et al. (2002) showed that Latino parents did not often find social contacts to be helpful resources when searching for information but rather found school-based and traditional sources more helpful.

The literature suggests that academic concerns are the primary reason for Latino parents' choices, not unlike other parents; however, secondary preferences, such as location and safety, may differ for non-Latino parents. The information gathering and usage processes appear to proceed differently for Latino parents, although the literature is less than conclusive on this point. And social networks, a prime source of information about schools, may be utilized less often by Latino parents, although these networks may provide less helpful information to Latino parents than non-Latino or more affluent parents (Mavrogordato & Stein, 2016). Thus, a further inquiry must focus on Latino parent decision-making as they view alternative education options for their children.

Summary

This chapter examined the parental decision-making process in selecting a charter school by reviewing the existing literature on the school choice movement. This examination addressed a brief background of school choice, public charter schools, factors involved in selecting charter schools, parent engagement in charter schools in general, and Latino parent decision-making when choosing a charter school.

Although NCES data demonstrate an increase in charter school enrollments, there has been a dramatic change in demographics, particularly regarding the Latino

community in charter school enrollment. Previous research has highlighted characteristics, opposing arguments, and stakeholder participation regarding charter schools (Caffee, 2018; Bulkley, 2011; Quinn, 2020; Brown, 2013). Researchers have also reported factors that affect charter school selection (Mawene & Ball, 2018; Chang et al., 2012; Bell et al., 2014) and parent engagement (Kimmelberg, 2014; Posey-Maddox, 2014; Holmes-Erickson, 2017). However, few have explored Latino parents' perspectives when selecting a charter school once they have decided to send their child to a charter school (Giles, 1998; Mavrogordato & Stein, 2014 & 2016; Ryan & Gonzalez, 2016).

Charters merit further inquiry given the ongoing debate about the schools, their contributions of quality education, the concerns and queries about why Latino parents select a charter, what they consider necessary as they examine the benefits of these schools, what motivates them to explore charters as a choice option, how they decide to enroll their children in charters, and the like merit further inquiry. As researchers suggest, additional investigation may discover how to address Latino parents' language, cultural, and economic barriers in selecting charter schools. Such studies may conduct comparisons between parent satisfaction with charter schools and their expectations for high academic achievement of their children, and also generate strategies and approaches for charter schools to better respond to their concerns and interest in better education for their children (Delaney, 2007; Mavrogordato & Stein, 2016; Mawene & Ball, 2018).

Chapter III: Methodology

The school choice movement has prompted the emergence of several options for parents who wish to enroll their children in alternative schools. One that has gained prominence and has expanded considerably is charter schools. Researchers claim that charter schools have met their promise to serve students better; however, it is argued that individual issues of access and equity concerns, specifically with children whose first language is other than English, continue to be raised (Mead and Green, 2019). In addition, there is an ongoing debate about the advantages and disadvantages of charter schools (Quinn, 2020; Molnar & Garcia, 2007; Brown, 2013; Bifulco & Bulkley, 2018).

One issue that has come to the forefront is parental engagement and decision-making in charter school selections. Whereas previous research suggests that these schools have witnessed high parent participation levels, depending on the school context and location, few parent engagement studies have exclusively focused on parents' perceptions by race or ethnicity. For instance, Mavrogordato and Stein (2016) conducted a survey to determine how Latino parents engage in the charter school marketplace; however, others recognize that additional research regarding Latino parent's perspectives is needed. Furthermore, previous researchers (Delaney, 2007) also call for further inquiry about other aspects of parents' decision-making in a charter school context. Therefore, this chapter introduces the research methodology used to conduct a qualitative study following the purpose of the study, research questions, describes the participants, the data collection protocols, the data collection process, and the data analysis procedures.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to examine Latino parents as decision-makers and self-described motivations in choosing secondary public charter schools over traditional public secondary schools. This study centered explicitly on Latino parents who have selected a charter school at the middle and high school levels, which allows for a deeper understanding of parental decision-making and identifies the reasons for choosing a charter school over traditional public schools.

The following questions guided the study:

- 1) Why do Latino parents select secondary public charter schools over traditional public schools in a large urban school district?
- 2) What strategies do Latino parents use when selecting a secondary public charter school for their children?
- 3) What factors influence Latino parents' decision-making when selecting secondary public charter school in a large urban district?
- 4) How do Latino parents decide to enroll their children in secondary public charter schools?

A qualitative research methodology was used to conduct this study. According to Merriam (2009), using this methodology allows the researcher to interpret the participants' experiences, how they construct their world, and the meanings attributed to their experiences. Further, "qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the

world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. The naturalist approach means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3).

Study Site and Participants

Researchers must also consider the study’s design to select the participants with experience in the research phenomenon (Clark & Creswell, 2010). The site and participants for this study were purposefully selected according to specific criteria. The researcher was careful to select only the number of participants planned for the study to avoid having too many people that could potentially derail the collection of individual participants’ perspectives. The focus on secondary education includes public charter schools, one middle and one high, in a large urban school district. One of the criteria for the two schools was to have an “A” Rating designation in the 2019 Texas Education Agency (TEA) accountability A-F rating system, the highest rating given by the agency. TEA’s A-F rating system measures year-over-year district and student performance beyond the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness results (TEA, 2019). Another criterion for the two selected schools was operating for at least twenty years and having a more than 50 percent Latino enrollment.

Study participants included fifteen Latino parents: six mothers from the middle school and eight mothers and one father from the high school. Participants were selected in cooperation with the schools' principals based on the following criteria:

- 1) Be the decision-maker who selected the charter school.
- 2) Be the parent for at least one full year in the charter school.
- 3) Represent a grade level at the middle school (six) or high school (nine).
- 4) Be nominated by the school campus principal or be a volunteer.

An initial meeting was set with district personnel regarding the study and the access to the two charter campus leaders. A District Approval Committee Consent Form was provided (Appendix A). Immediately after the district approval, a meeting was established with the principals of the two selected sites to request their support for promoting the study, and a Campus Leader Consent Form was presented to both leaders. (Appendix B). A Study Participant Recruitment flyer (Appendix C) was created in English and Spanish and distributed throughout the campuses via the campus social media platform and phone calls from the campus parent liaisons.

In addition, the researcher requested an opportunity for an initial conversation to present the planned study to parents over the phone and via a virtual parent meeting via Zoom®. During this time, the researcher explained the study background and the measures to be used for maintaining confidentiality during the study and let them know to expect a follow-up request for their support and participation in the study. The parents were also notified that a Letter to Participant (Appendix D), Interview Question Guide

(Appendix E), and Consent Form for Parent Participants (Appendix F) would be emailed directly before the interview. Contact information and the IRB-approved consent form were also provided. The meeting and subsequent interviews were conducted in both English and Spanish. However, parents did not have to speak English and were given access to the interview translation in their native language.

Data Collection Protocols

Data collection consists of field-based and flexible approaches in qualitative research because the findings will likely change throughout the study (Creswell, 2008). Data collection protocols included interviews, and documents, such as internal parent survey reports and other printed and online information pertinent to the study.

Interviews. A valuable data source that yields a great deal of information was interviewing. The researcher may ask questions about “facts, beliefs, feelings, motives, present and past behaviors as standards for behavior, or conscious reasons for actions or feelings” (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001, p. 159). A total of fourteen individual interviews were conducted using an open-ended interview guide. Interviews were conducted via phone and zoom conferencing, since the study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, and recorded. Parents had the option of participating in a phone interview conducted in English or Spanish. Each parent received a letter requesting their participation and explained that data collected during interviews would be completely anonymous, assuring them that their identity and that of their children would be confidential and not be disclosed.

Open-ended questions allowed the participants to create their responses (Clark & Creswell, 2010). Follow-up questions sought to probe further and, when necessary, alternative in-depth questions were added. The open-ended interview guide included demographic information and questions related to the study's purpose, such as participants' experiences with charter schools, their knowledge about charter schools, and their enrollment process. Specifically, questions concentrated on the study's four core questions, including factors influencing parents' decision-making when selecting a public charter school in a large urban district. Finally, the questions sought to discover strategies used by the Latino parents when selecting a charter school and how their decisions were made.

In qualitative research, it is essential to field-test the open-ended interview guide prior to the actual occasion to ensure the validity and reliability of the questions. The guide for this study was field-tested in English and Spanish with three non-study parents who had similar characteristics as the potential study participants. This process ensured that the questions were clear, precise and understandable; would accommodate participants' preferences; and yield responses that addressed the study's purpose and questions.

Documents. Written or online materials are essential data sources as forms of documents in qualitative studies. Documents are a source for collecting relevant or related information to the subject of the study (Morse & Richards, 2002). For this research, documents collected were relevant for verifying participants' knowledge of the

available information to help in their selection of a charter school. The documents included campus information, the Texas Academic Performance Report (TAPR), the Enrollment and Lottery Procedures Guide, and campus websites. The purpose of the TAPR report was to present the last three years of academic performance and enrollment. The Enrollment and Lottery Procedures Guide provided evidence of the enrollment process' structural operations and insight into parent information accessibility. In order to learn more about parental access availability in virtual communication, the researcher navigated a brief review of the campus and district websites.

The 2020 pandemic impacted many aspects of this study. Twelve of the interviews were held via phone conversations and two were conducted using video conferencing via Zoom© to honor the social distancing norms in effect. Moreover, zoom© Conference and TapeACall recordings helped the researcher review meetings, capture specific comments, and seek trends within the responses. Brause (2000) states that although current studies commonly collect data via phone and video, transcribing the information recorded is laborious and time-intensive. Observations were not conducted, but parents' nonverbal expressions, emotions and passions were noted during in the interviews.

Data Collection Procedures

The study proceeded after all required approvals were secured. The first endorsement came from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at The University of Texas at Austin, permitting the study. Next, collaboration from the district personnel and

secondary campus leaders was attained to recruit parents and contact potential participants through a recruitment email flyer (Appendix C). Consent from all participants in the study was requested, and, as part of the recruitment effort, the researcher attached the Consent Form (Appendix F). In anticipation that parents might wish to participate and respond in Spanish, all communications and information associated with the study were presented in English and Spanish, based on the participant's preference.

All interview sessions were scheduled in a way that would accommodate the interviewees. If Zoom© technology was not available for any parent, interviews were conducted via phone or video to facilitate social distancing. Participants were offered three options: in person, via telephone, and virtual via Zoom©. Interviews were recorded and participants' identities protected. Names were neither stated nor requested during the interviews. Whether in print or virtual form, all pertinent documents were collected at the beginning of the study, and any additional information was compiled as they were mentioned. Any other useful documental materials were collected at the time of the interview meeting.

The Participant Consent Form explained the study's requirements and was collected once the participants signed it via DocuSign ©, a digital signature software. This procedure established and maintained a rapport with the researcher to keep abreast of the study during all phases. A critical condition was to focus on the actual rather than the abstract or hypothetical when discussing the process with the participants. A

concentrated effort was made to avoid suggestive words that might influence their responses while at the same time listening to their answers and taking notes to keep from interrupting.

Data Analysis Procedures

Leedy and Ormrod (2010) emphasize that data analysis must begin as quickly as possible. The researcher then develops categories and analyzes the interrelationships between the categories. It is essential to use a constant comparative method that establishes a relationship between data collection and analysis. The conceptual density will then determine the final theory among those relationships (Schram, 2003). The data management system will serve as a repository and sort data into categories or themes (Bryant & Charmaz, 2010). Interviews were recorded via TapeACall© or Zoom © and transcribed using the Transcribe by Wreally © Computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software platform in the participant's language and translated, if necessary.

According to Creswell (1998), the data analysis spiral ensures that the researcher reviews the data several times. After retrieving the raw data, the researcher first organizes and categorizes the data using a computer database. The next step includes interpreting and reflecting on the data using anecdotal notes to generate initial themes. The third step consists of classifying the data or themes to assist in the data's meaning. The final step is the synthesis of the data by constructing tables, visuals and offering hypotheses or propositions (Leedy and Ormrod, 2010, p.153)

It is essential to acknowledge that the qualitative approach will allow the researcher to explain Latino parental decision-making and self-described motivations in choosing alternative public schools, including charters over traditional public schools. It developed a theory by primarily collecting interview data, relating it to specific categories and themes, and finally creating a visual representation or advancing a theoretical model. As researchers observe, this method might limit a researcher's ability to be flexible and may predispose the researcher to identify categories and themes too soon into the study (Charmaz, 2000; Glaser, 1992). Thus, the researcher will use specific techniques to ensure the validity and trustworthiness of the collected data.

Research Quality Measures

During a qualitative study, it is essential to use measures to assure the validity and trustworthiness of the information collected. The resulting findings and quality are dependent on the researcher. A process must be established in which credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are kept, all while building trust (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Therefore, triangulation, member checks, and journaling were employed for this study.

Triangulation was based on multiple sources to develop a hypothesis or theory (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010) and was used in this study as part of the data collection process. Parent interviews, campus and district information outlets, student performance reports, enrollment process guides, internal parent survey reports, and other pertinent documents were part of the data collection process. Member checks were requested from the

participants. This is the process of asking the participants to review the responses and interpretations of the report and denote if they are fair and accurate (Clark & Creswell, 2010). Once the interviews were transcribed, parents were asked to review the transcriptions to verify their responses or add related information. Journaling was used to capture details and information from the participants where ideas were recorded, participants' perspectives analyzed, and feedback received. Through journaling, the researcher may also obtain reflections on the research, participants' responses, and actions (Janesick, 1999).

In addition, specific ethical considerations guide the researcher. Clark and Creswell (2010) suggest that collecting data from participants may be personal and is essential to building a level of trust, depending on the high level of participant disclosure. There are several ethical issues that a researcher must anticipate. Participants have certain rights that must be respected, especially during data collection. All reports and documentation should be anonymous, so all participants involved in the study are protected. Ethical guidelines can help the researcher communicate the importance of adhering to confidentiality and ethical standards every step of the way.

For this study, each individual's needs, values and desires were respected, and the reputation and position of the participants took the highest consideration at all levels. There were several safeguards used to ensure that participants' rights were protected. Participants received communication in writing from the researcher about the study's voluntary nature, the ability to withdraw from the scholarship at any time, and the option

to decline to respond to any question. Research objectives and the collection of data methods and activities were also part of the written consent form. All consent forms, written transcripts, and study documents were stored and secured for five years.

Role of the Researcher

In qualitative research, the researcher's role is instrumental. In this study, the researcher acted as an objective observer and attempted to understand the possible dynamic between researcher and parent participant. Due to the perceived imbalance of power, the researcher had to find "...a common epistemological ground: the researcher determination to minimize the distance and separateness of researcher-participant relationships," as phrased by Karnieli-Miller, Strier, and Pessach (2009, p. 279).

Furthermore, the researcher was qualified, prepared, and have experience in the study context. This researcher has been an educator for twenty-five years, holds a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Political Science and Spanish, a Master's Degree in Curriculum and Instruction, and holds a valid Texas certification as a teacher, principal, and superintendent. There is no direct relationship to any participants, representing a conflict of interest or indirectly presenting partiality in the research study. The researcher has participated in various collegial research courses that include a qualitative research course at The University of Texas at Austin. The researcher is bilingual and bicultural in English and Spanish; has experience developing interviews and survey questions for faculty, staff, parents and students; has participated in various selection hiring committees; and has made numerous hiring decisions.

Summary

This chapter outlined the methodology used to conduct this study. The procedures and steps employed to examine Latino parents as decision-makers in choosing charter schools were described, including purpose and research, methodology, study site, participants, data collection protocols and procedures, data analysis procedures, research quality measures, ethical considerations, and the researcher's role. The results of this study are presented in Chapter IV.

Chapter IV: Findings of the Study

This research study aimed to understand Latino parents' perspectives when selecting a charter school for their children. As illustrated in Chapter II, school choice provides alternatives for educating children, and public charter schools have become an optimal choice. Research has shown that these schools offer various benefits to students, but the voices of Latino parents are missing. This study attempts to expand our understanding of Latino parent's decision-making to enroll their children in secondary public charter schools.

Following qualitative exploratory research guidelines, Latino parent perspectives are reported in this chapter. To this end, the findings that surfaced via the four research questions during interviews with fifteen Latino parents' are presented. This chapter includes a descriptive profile of public charters as a contextual basis for the study. It also offers a profile for each of the purposefully selected participants. Furthermore, emerging themes that address each research question are defined, explained, and followed by participants' views to illuminate Latino parents' decision-making process when selecting a secondary public charter school for their children.

Purpose of the Study

This qualitative exploratory study examined Latino parents' considerations and decision-making when choosing a specific secondary public charter school for their children within a large urban school district in Texas. The main aim of this research was

to gain an understanding of Latino parents' motivations and the process they use for selecting a secondary public charter school over a traditional public school.

Research Questions

Four research questions guided this study:

- 1) Why do Latino parents select a secondary public charter schools over traditional public schools in a large urban school district?
- 2) What strategies do Latino parents use when selecting a secondary public charter school for their children?
- 3) What factors influence Latino parents' decision-making when selecting a secondary secondary public charter school in a large urban district?
- 4) How do Latino parents decide to enroll their children in a secondary public charter school?

For this study, the term “parents” referred to the biological parents or guardians and any other family members who serve as parental figures and decision-makers regarding their children's schooling.

Charter School Profile

Given the nature of this study, it was essential that the secondary public charter schools meet the established selection criteria and provide a contextual basis for the research. In addition, it is critical to note that Texas school districts and schools that focus on student academic performance, including ethnicity and socioeconomic status, are

archived by the Texas Academic Performance Reports (TAPR), which also provides a listing of school and district staff, programs, and student demographics.

In 2017-18, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) rating was revamped; the campus had one year to adjust to the A-F rating. Although the campus was rated A-F, TEA did not apply the rating and instead used the “Met Standard” or “Did Not Meet Standard” designation. In 2019-20, TEA again made a conditional adjustment to ratings due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and all Texas schools were given the “Declared State of Disaster” accountability rating for 2020.

Information for the study’s two charter schools was derived from TEA reports, TAPR, and the schools’ websites. Each public charter background included TEA ratings, the number of economically disadvantaged student populations, the Latino population, the number of emergent bilingual students, the average class size, the percentage of staff, and the application process and protocols.

Public Charter “A” Middle School

According to the TEA rating of 2017-18, Charter A “Met Standard” in 2018-19 with an “A” Rating. The school served a diverse student population that included 90 percent economically disadvantaged students, while the state averaged around 60 percent economically disadvantaged student populations. The Latino population for all three years was over 65 percent, while the state average was as low as 50 percent; data revealed that the sub-population of emergent bilingual students grew increasingly. Further, according to TAPR, Charter A had an average class size of twenty-seven

students per class, which was much higher than the state average of twenty students. The number of professional staff, including administration, teachers, and counselors, was 20 percent higher than the state average of 64 percent. Table 1 summarizes the last three TEA year ratings for Charter A Middle School.

Table 1:

Texas Academic Performance Report 2018-2020—Charter A (Middle School)

	TEA Rating	Economic Disadvan- tage	Latino Student Population	Emergent Bilinguals	Class Size	Professional Staff
2017-2018	Met Standard	Over 90%	Over 70%	Over 24%	27 avg	Over 89%
State average		58.8%	52.4%	18.9%	21.2 avg	64.1
2018-2019	“A” Rated	Over 90%	Over 65%	Over 27%	27 avg	Over 85%
State average		60.6%	52.6%	19.5%	20.5 avg	64.1
2019-2020	Not rated: “Declared State of Disaster” for the 2020 accountability rating					

In addition, this charter school provides ample information to prospective and interested parents. Charter A’s website includes SchoolMint, an online dashboard that organizes all Pre-K-12 data and information regarding the admissions process for administrators, parents, and students. According to Charter A enrollment information, this school accepts applications for the entire year, but parents must create an account in

order to apply to the campus. Admissions is based on a lottery and begins in March for the upcoming academic school year. The lottery itself takes place at the end of March, after which the charter system immediately extends an offer to the families by phone, mail or email. There is no physical (in-person) lottery event for parents.

After accepting the offer or seat to join the campus, families complete the registration packet for the upcoming school year. Families are encouraged to double-check their child's birthdate and grade level for the coming school year; then, the application is appropriately processed. At this time, parents are urged to update their contact information, and for those on the waitlist, the school continues to extend admissions offers through the start of the school year. To register, parents must provide the following documents: proof of residency, a social security card, a birth certificate, an immunization record, a parent photo ID, the student's previous school records, and proof of guardianship, if applicable. There is a slight variation for Pre-K families since registration begins later in April due to TEA guidelines.

Families are encouraged to accept placement offers; then, the campus notifies the parents regarding the next steps. Charter A emphasizes that there are no academic or behavioral requirements for enrollment. However, pre-K-12 and current students are urged to go through the re-enrollment process from January through March by updating vaccination records and changes to their address, and uploading either a utility bill, mortgage statement or lease.

Charter A also informs parents that if the number of children interested in a specific grade level exceeds the number of seats available for that grade, a waitlist for the school year is created. Thus, it is not until spaces become available that seats are filled with students from the application waitlist. Furthermore, to facilitate the enrollment process, Charter A provides transportation services to parents and students. This service consists of free bus rides from various bus stops in selected central locations to make it easy for families to attend the schools.

Public Charter “B” High School

This public charter high school “Met Standard” in 2018-19 with an “A” rating, according to the TEA rating of 2017-18, and served a campus with 38 percent and 78 percent economically disadvantaged students, respectively, while the state averaged around 60 percent economically disadvantaged. The Latino student population was over 95 percent for all three years, while the state average was low at 50 percent. In reviewing the subpopulation of emergent bilinguals, also known as English learners, it was noted that Charter A’s subpopulation grew increasingly to 17.5 percent. Other information provided by TAPR included an average class size of twenty-three students, slightly higher than the state average of twenty students. The percentage of professional staff, including administration, teachers and counselors, was similar to the state average of 64 percent. Table 2 includes a summary of information for Charter B for the last three years of TEA ratings.

Table 2:**Texas Academic Performance Report 2018-2020—Charter B (High School)**

	TEA Rating	Economic Disadvan- tage	Latino Student Population	Emergent Bilinguals	Class Size	Professional Staff
2017-2018	Met Standard	Over 38%	Over 95%	Over 11%	22 avg	Over 65%
State average		58.8%	52.4%	18.8%	20 avg	64.4
2018-2019	“A” Rated	Over 78%	Over 96%	Over 19%	24 avg	Over 63%
State average		60.6%	52.6%	19.5%	20.5 avg	64.1
2019-2020	Not rated: “Declared State of Disaster” for the 2020 accountability rating					

Charter B’s website provides additional information, including SchoolMint, an online dashboard that organizes all K-12 data and information regarding admissions for administrators, parents and students. On the website, Charter B families create an account in order to apply online. The school uses a computer application system that runs a random lottery every year in February as part of the enrollment process. During the application process, families are encouraged to navigate the system map to select the closest campus to the applicant and, although not required, choose a secondary campus as a backup if they do not get into the campus closest to their home. Charter B also provides transportation for students who come from within a two-mile radius of the school. Once

the application is processed, and the lottery determined, electronic communication is sent immediately via email or text message notifying the families of the results. Students not selected are placed on a waitlist until the start of the academic year and cautioned that the waitlist application does not roll over from year to year.

In addition to TEA and TAPR reports, it is evident that there are some similarities in the information that both charter schools provide to interested Latino parents on their websites. In reviewing both websites, six inquiries were compared: 1) Was the website information available in Spanish? 2) Was there a recruitment video? 3) Did parents have to create an account? 4) Was there an enrollment process with specific instructions? 5) Was there information provided about the lottery process? 6) Was there additional contact information?

Table 3 offers a comparative summary of the websites for both Charter A and Charter B. Both schools provide information to the parents in Spanish, both include an enrollment process with instructions, offer information regarding the lottery process, and require parents to create an account so they can fill out an initial application to apply for the lottery. Both schools also provide a link and a direct phone number for further contact. The only difference between the schools' websites is that Charter A provides a recruitment video while Charter B does not.

Table 3:

Comparative Analysis of Charter Schools A and B Website Information

Charter School	Available in Spanish	An account must be created	Enrollment process instructions are available	Re-enrollment process instructions are available	Lottery information available	Contact information available	Recruitment video
“A”	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Email/phone	Yes
“B”	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Email/phone	No

Additional information provided by both schools’ websites for the parents is an academic calendar, social-emotional services and schedules, the school’s vision and mission statements, graduation requirements, policies on promotion and retention, assessment calendars, college readiness, and transportation information. Due to COVID-19, both campus websites offer a section on asynchronous and synchronous learning protocols that include technology resources for students and parents. Charter A and Charter B websites also provide students and families with frequently asked questions (FAQs), and both have a section requesting donations to enhance their school funding. For external prospects, there is a section on employment opportunities and leadership pathways. Finally, Charter A added a website service not initially found when first examined, which is a live online chat where questions about the campus, business, school culture, and the leadership team can be answered immediately by a live person.

Participants of the Study

Participating parents were purposely selected to include six Latino parents from Charter A Middle School and nine Latino parents from Charter B High School. To meet the selection criteria, parents must:

- Be the decision-maker who selects the charter school
- Be a parent in the charter school for at least one complete year
- Represent a grade level for their middle school student or high school student
- Be nominated to participate in the study by the campus principal, or volunteer to participate

Parents selected represented K-12 grade levels, alumni of current college students, or college graduates. All participants' voices and insights were essential to contextualize their decision to enroll their children in a charter school. Several parents had multiple students enrolled at the time of the study, and at least half of the parents interviewed had a child, niece or nephew who had graduated from the campus. Of the total participating parents, there were fourteen mothers and one father.

To maintain anonymity, names of the charter system and charter campuses were omitted and participants were assigned a pseudonym. A brief profile of each participant is offered to illustrate the diversity of backgrounds and experiences of Latino parents who chose to enroll their children in middle or high public charter schools. The majority of parents were not as forthcoming with their personal journeys as they were willing to

share a desire where their children could successfully navigate the educational system and bring future possibilities and opportunities they themselves were not afforded.

Middle School Parent Participants

Alicia and her husband are small business owners, and both emigrated from Mexico in the early nineties. Alicia and her children are one of first-generation families for Charter A. They are proud parents of four children and two grandchildren who have attended Charter A's system for twenty-five years. She has one child in 10th grade, one in 6th grade, and two older children who graduated from Charter A currently in college. She originally heard about Charter A through a long-time friend.

Francisca currently works as a housekeeper and has been married for seventeen years. She is now the mother of five children at Charter A. Her children are in the 12th, 11th, 9th, 7th, and 2nd grades. Francisca first heard about Charter A through a friend and neighbor who offered her experience with the charter school, and bragged about the systemic structures for students to succeed. Francisca was also attracted to the mention of Spanish classes at Charter A because she wanted her children to be bilingual.

Rosa has dedicated her life to being a housewife and mother. She has been a parent at Charter A for twenty years. She has three children who have graduated from Charter A and one currently enrolled. Rosa was first made aware of the charter school by a close family friend. Her primary reason for enrolling her children in Charter A was that she felt the campus would offer a more rigorous education than the traditional public school setting.

Melly is an alumnus from Charter A. She and her husband have been Charter A parents for nine years. They have four children in the 2nd, 4th, 6th, and 8th grades, and all began their kindergarten education at Charter A. Although she felt she had different experiences as a first-generation student, she enjoyed her own experience at Charter A. As a family, they appreciated the communication between families, teachers, and administration.

Maribel is a housewife and actively involved in her children's education. A mother of five students, all of whom have attended Charter A, Maribel has known the system for over twenty years ever since her nephew first enrolled as a Charter A student. Prior to attending Charter A, she noticed her nephew was not well-disciplined or pushed academically in the traditional public school setting. She did, however, witness a positive change in her nephew when he moved to Charter A; his attitude toward school changed dramatically for the better. This made Maribel want to enroll her children in a school that would devote that much time to her children as they did to her nephew.

Mila is a housewife with four children. Her oldest daughter attended Charter A in 5th grade before advancing to Charter B for 6th grade. Mila first became aware of the charter system from the traditional elementary public school teacher, who informed her that the charter school would better support the educational needs of her daughter and three other children. When Mila began researching the charter system, she collaborated with other neighborhood mothers and a sister-in-law to discuss the school. As a result, they all agreed to enroll their children together and support them equally.

High School Parent Participants

As stated, one father, José, participated along with his wife. Tina and José were teenage immigrants who came to the United States from Mexico. They struggled at school because of the lack of support from their immediate families, who did not have the knowledge or means to navigate the public school system. Tina and José have been married for twenty-three years and had three children attend Charter B, the youngest of which is in 12th grade. They both have been Charter B parents since 2013, and have since advocated for charter schools in Austin. Tina's first interaction with Charter B was through her niece, who was very dedicated to her studies and had a fantastic work ethic while attending school.

Illiana is a mother of a current 6th grader and an 11th grader at Charter B. She found it necessary to dedicate herself to her kid's education and believes she is a resource for others. She was introduced and referred to Charter B by a family friend with a child at the school. She also heard that Charter B was one of the best schools in the area from a Channel 45 news report. After listening to the report, Illiana found herself wanting to research the campus to see if it was a proper fit for her child.

Florencia is an immigrant from México and has lived in the United States for nineteen years. Educated in Mexico to the high school level, Florencia struggled to make a comfortable living after relocating to the United States. She has three children, all of whom attend Charter B, with the youngest graduating this year. Florencia discovered the school by driving through the neighborhood. She stated, "While observing the school, I

saw the student behavior and interactions from afar until I visited the school.” She explains that the enrollment process was the same as a traditional public school, except for the lottery procedure. Initially, while her daughter was on the waiting list, Florencia started applying to other schools, but fortunately, Charter B called to offer her daughter a seat.

Elisa and her husband immigrated from Mexico to the United States, and have been Charter B parents for nine years; one child graduated, and the other is in 11th grade. Elisa first learned about Charter B through family friends and remembers how they boasted about the school’s reputation regarding student support, small class sizes, and, most importantly, the focus on college preparation. Elisa’s husband researched the school’s website and read all about their educational and student support services; services she had not seen offered in traditional public schools. Elisa went through the lottery process with her daughter, but she did not initially gain a seat; she was placed on a waitlist and eventually earned a seat. Elisa’s own experience with Charter B demonstrated the connection between testimonials she had heard from students, her family’s friends, and other parents.

Melissa is a mother of four children who lost her job as a health provider due to the pandemic. She has three children at Charter B in the 6th, 9th, and 11th grades, and she graduated from the system. Her sister-in-law, whose children were enrolled, was the first to encourage Melissa to apply and invited her to parent’s meetings to observe the school. Melissa found that getting her first child into Charter B was an excellent opportunity to

receive high-quality accessibility to teachers and college preparation, something she felt would not be available in a traditional school setting. Another consideration that helped her decide to enroll her child in Charter B was the availability of transportation. “I was having transportation issues, and they offered the bus route by my home.”

Alisela is a health provider who lives with her husband and two children, currently enrolled at Charter B, one in 6th grade and one in 11th grade. She initially heard about the school from a family friend who had a son that graduated from Charter B. Alisela also heard about Charter B’s student culture from student testimonials, like a former student who admitted that he had not been a well-disciplined student, but with the help of teachers and other students, he gained those skills. “That got my attention. I, too, wanted my son to reflect about the possibilities.” She added, “It is hard in our culture to get educated. My parents did not tell me that I had to go to college. The expectation from my parents was that I was to find a job and get married.” Alisela also stated, “I am happy to say that in this school, the expectations and actions are all about getting our children to college.”

Ana and her husband decided that she would stay at home and dedicate herself to ensuring her three children received a quality education. Two children attend Charter B in the 12th and 8th grades, and one daughter is in college. Ana saw Charter B’s campus marquee while driving through the area and decided to stop to ask questions. Her first impression was how clean the campus was and how attentive the staff were when she inquired about the school.

Marina immigrated from Mexico and is the mother of two Charter B scholars for the last ten years. One child is currently an alumnus attending a university on a full-ride scholarship, and the other is a 6th grader. She first noticed the campus as she drove through the area and then asked a friend about the school with a son enrolled in Chapter B. She asked numerous questions regarding the school to ensure that it was a right fit for her children. Marina stated, “I found that Charter B offered so many opportunities to my children and did not hold their immigrant status as a barrier for educational access.” She questioned if traditional public schools would have offered them the same opportunities, such as scholarships and university accessibility.

Finally, it should be noted that parents who participated in this study were selected to represent a specific charter school, either middle school or high school. However, some parents had more than one child and, in some cases, had children attending both schools, as illustrated in Table 4.

Table 4:**Summary of Parent Participants**

Parent (pseudo name)	Occupation	Years as a charter school parent	Parent of current middle school	Parent of current high school	# Children in charter school	Learned of charter school from...
Alicia	Small business owner/volunteer at school	25	yes	yes	4	Friend
Francisca	Housewife/volunteer at school	15	yes	yes	5	Friend
Rosa	Housewife	20	yes	yes	4	Friend
Melly	Housewife/volunteer at school	9	yes	no	4	Alumni
Maribel	Housewife/volunteer at school	20	yes	yes	5	Family member
Mila	Housewife/volunteer at school	8	yes	yes	3	Elementary teacher
Tina & José	Small business owner/volunteer at school	8	no	yes	1	Nieces
Illiana	Housewife	5	yes	yes	2	Alumni
Florencia	Housewife/volunteer at school	9	no	yes	1	Elementary teacher
Elisa	Housewife	9	no	yes	2	Education fair
Melissa	Unemployed due to COVID 19/volunteer at school	7	yes	yes	3	Sister-in-law
Alisela	Health provider	6	yes	yes	2	Alumni
Ana	Housewife	9	yes	yes	2	Campus drive-by
Marina	Housewife/volunteer at school	10	yes	no	1	Campus drive-by

Findings

This exploratory study focused on Latino parents' decision-making thought process when selecting a public charter school versus a traditional public school setting. Fourteen Latino parents participated in the survey, representing one charter middle school and one charter high school, pseudo-titled Charter A and Charter B. Results are derived from parents' interviews and document analysis. Parents' perceptions and insights were organized according to the study's research questions that revealed emergent themes for each area of focus, including specific attributes or features. Each research question was followed by an emergent theme and a statement illustrating the participants' views associated with that theme.

Research Question One

Why do Latino parents select a secondary public charter school over traditional public schools in a large urban school district?

When identifying parents' explanations or justifications for selecting a secondary public charter, it is essential that the emergent themes reflect a set of reasons or primary basis. The data shows that participating parents chose a secondary charter school over a traditional public school for various reasons, most notably: access to better education that promotes higher goals; a smaller school setting that values personalized instruction; teacher and staff accessibility that enables constructive relationships to develop; and sibling preferences that facilitate the admission of family siblings. These particular

themes emerged as the most powerful reasons Latino parents enrolled their children in charter secondary schools.

Access to better education. According to parents' perceptions, access to a "better education" is of paramount importance. For these parents, a better education means providing their child a higher quality education, enabling them to have options, and exposing them to academic and social experiences that focus on the individual needs and aspirations of the student. Better education also means an education that allows their children to successfully earn a high school diploma and a college degree and obtain an excellent job for a better life. The participating Latino parents gave insights into why they chose a secondary public charter over a traditional public school. As gleaned from their comments, these parents strived to gain better opportunities for their children to reach their full educational potential. While most parents agreed that the main reason to select a charter school was the possibility of gaining a better education, several specific explanations were evident.

For Tina, a better education meant that her children could attend a school system that provided intentional college preparation and afford them more opportunities for a better life. Tina explained,

As an immigrant teenager, I was unable to transition to the American public education system. I knew that it would be challenging for my children if my husband and I did not focus on getting them an excellent solid education. I was looking for a better future for them. We wanted more for our children. When we

heard about the opportunities of going to college and knowing that other Charter A students had been successful in college, we wanted that for our daughter.

Throughout the years, I have advocated that the students at Charter B are working so hard to get ahead. They want to do something with their lives, and we know that will happen with access to good education.

Similarly, Rosa believed that access to a reputable charter school rather than a traditional public school would give her four children a chance to attend college. Rosa stated,

I enrolled my children at Charter A because I wanted a better education to allow my child to go to the university. Unlike the traditional public schools, the majority of the students at Charter A and other high-performing charters can prepare their students to be college-ready. The entire staff and counselors provide access to rigorous classes that will support them academically. I found out that the traditional schools focused on preparing only the top students, including 15- 20 students, on seeking college resources. At Charter A, everyone is involved in providing support. I know this because when my three eldest children attended college after being students at Charter A, they were well prepared and did not struggle. Instead, they learned how to access information to better themselves.

Ana also saw that selecting Charter B, rather than attending the traditional public school zoned to them, would give her current college student and her 12th and 8th grade children the opportunities to promote higher achievement and provide them with the capacity to compete. Ana further explained,

When I started investigating and researching Charter A, I found out that the quality of the school would assist my kids to get to college. I wanted a better life for them, and I heard that the staff would expose them to a challenging education to get them ready for college. I also noticed that my children were motivated to do better and not just settle for their typical education. I liked that very much. I saw a difference in how they worked to achieve higher grades and how they started to compete with their friends. This drive is something I had not seen from either one of them.

School and cohort structure. According to the study's participants, school size is an important consideration when selecting a charter school option. Small school settings are more attractive than larger, traditional public schools because they focus on 120 students per generation or grade level. By using the lottery admission process to limit the number of students, charters can reassure parents that the schools will foster a robust academic and cultural approach to their child's education. Smaller classroom settings mean that students get individualized attention where everyone knows each other, like in a family environment. Students have more opportunities to interact with their teachers and build positive, close relationships. As Elisa commented,

The school is outstanding, and teachers are focused on kids. Students are part of small class sizes that can bring individual attention to all students. The small school setting is a safe space and can add additional academic, counseling support. The teachers emphasize that good behavior and work ethic can ensure a

positive classroom environment for all students. We decided to enroll our daughters at Charter B because they were much smaller than the traditional public school they were zoned to attend. My daughters would get to know other students and teachers a lot more in the smaller school setting. I felt that those relationships were meaningful and would create an atmosphere where they can support my daughters whenever they needed help with homework or any of their classes. Smaller size classes would mean my daughters are getting more attention academically and socially. On the larger campuses, it is tough for the teachers to pay attention to all students.

Similarly, Maribel added that she selected the charter campus because of the small-sized campus environment.

I wanted to make sure that my kids received the necessary attention and support, and I figured a small school setting would take care of my concern. The traditional public school by my house has so many more students than Charter A, and that is why I decided this school was good for them. I have stayed at Charter A because I have observed that they offer students academic and social support due to small classes. I was not confident that my children would get that same support in a traditional public school setting.

Mila was also attracted to the small school setting for her four children. She remembered the conversation with her husband.

My husband thought it would be a good idea to enroll the kids in a smaller school. He appreciates the “generational” structure where every cohort is no more than 120 students. This small atmosphere creates a family culture where everyone knows each other and supports each other, which is very difficult to develop in a large traditional public school setting. We believed that a smaller environment would be more like a family, everyone looking out for each other.

Data shows that the extended school day was also a compelling reason for Latino parents to choose a charter school, in addition to the smaller size consideration. A school day starts at 7:30 a.m. and extends to 5:00 p.m. Francisca reflected,

I wanted to make sure that my children got as much support from their teacher. I needed my children to be in small classes and not with many students where they would be ignored, like many traditional public school settings. I felt the smaller the class size would allow the teachers to focus on my children’s education. It is important to me that teachers know my children. I want them to be able to teach and understand what areas they need to get better at. I also appreciate that my children have extended days as part of the school day. That helps me out, and it provides extra activities for my children.

Tina also revealed the importance of the small class size when selecting and enrolling her daughter in a charter school.

I like to be engaged in my daughter's schooling because I must know that the principles and morals are aligned at home and school. In a small class, the teacher is aware of everything. She is not overwhelmed by having too many students in her classroom. My attraction to Charter B's was indeed the smaller enrollment and the belief that my children would receive more individualized teaching and support.

Illiana purposefully searched for a small school setting with a good reputation since her daughter was in 3rd grade. She stated,

I was very interested in a small-size campus for my daughter to ensure that she was around other students that she would get to know. After talking to my daughter and family, we all wanted her to be in a smaller school. As soon as I submitted our interest online, I was notified that my child was accepted via the lottery. I did not want to lose her spot. I immediately accepted her seat and drove up to the campus with registration documents. I wanted to make sure that her seat was not going to be given to anyone else.

Ana was also attracted to the smaller-sized campus setting rather than the traditional larger-sized public school. Here she emphasized how it would encourage closeness, like in a family tradition.

I was interested in a less crowded school than a traditional public school and liked the concept of having only 120 students per generation. I believed that the

smaller the campus, the more opportunity to build a family culture, and everyone is close to one another. I also felt that the small class size would mean that the adults would give them more attention, and they would not be just a number, like many of the larger schools.

Teacher and staff accessibility. Data reveals that easy access to teachers and staff is an important reason parents choose a secondary public charter versus a traditional public school. For many mothers, the reassurance that other adults will assist their children in a rigorous academic environment is another reason to choose a secondary public charter school. The availability of teachers was fundamental for the parents who participated in this study. They viewed the teachers as being most accessible to parents when questions arose related to their children's education; being available to work with students individually as needed to provide academic, social, and emotional support; and being able to foster ongoing motivation and trust.

Principal and staff availability were also important reasons that parents selected a charter secondary school. Both principal and other staff were responsive to parents' inquiries, as well, and welcoming interaction and communication generally and during informational meetings. According to Alicia,

The staff was very attentive to my child, and they answered all the questions that parents were asking. However, as a parent, that meeting was not an act. My family has experienced that the teachers are constantly communicating with our

children and with us parents. We know that teachers are always available, whether it is through phone, email, or parent conferences. They will also be available before or after school if necessary.

Maribel also appreciated that teachers were supporting her children during class, as she observed first-hand.

I initially felt like I was at home when talking to the principal and teacher. In a public school setting, I saw a difference. From my experience, the traditional public school did not require teachers to be available for students. My kids can reach out to their teachers if they have questions about homework or any other assignments. I am proud to say that they are all great readers because of the time the teachers took with them. Many parents need to know that they must work with the admin and teachers. I know that I did not have the same access to the principal and teachers at the traditional public school. I can confidently say that communication between the home and school is essential.

Alisela mentioned that the reputation of the teacher's availability to students at Charter B was a huge reason for her choosing a secondary public charter school. She described,

I began searching for a middle school for my oldest son; I had a hard time with his teachers at the traditional public school. We had a bad experience with the lack of support from teachers. They did not want to help him with his school, he was miserable, and his behavior showed it. When I heard from other parents how

Charter B teachers were so supportive, I started enrolling in the charter school. I am happy that we switched schools; I do not think he would have made it at the other school. Although he cried and was not happy about the move, he noticed that all his teachers were helping him during school and when he had questions at home. The teachers were always there to help him out. He now states that he is glad that I decided to enroll him at Charter B because he is a year from graduating and going to college.

Rosa observed teachers being very accessible and willing to go beyond the call of duty to support students as soon as they started school. She recalled how the teachers assisted her children with their homework and were responsive to her questions.

My children would seek help with their homework, and they were always available and of service to parents. The teachers would meet with me whenever I had a question or any issues; I always felt welcomed, informed, and heard. Charter A serviced my children like a private school. They provided the best education possible for them to get into college. Although the curriculum was challenging and they had much homework, they instilled discipline and self-learning. I remember that my children asked us to sign their home log every single night.

Similarly, according to Iliana, both the teachers and principal focused on the students' needs, as she expounded,

I feel that the teachers and principal are highly focused on the whole child, supporting them academically, socially, and emotionally. The teachers are interested and are motivated to help students with excellence. They gained our trust by connecting with our students and other parents. We are a family, and we know because the teachers and staff are very professional and interested in meeting my children's needs. If my children were to have stayed at a traditional public school, the support and services would not be the same.

As an alumna of Charter A, Iliana experienced the high level of attention given by teachers and staff and appreciated that her children received the same guidance and support.

Their teachers and principals have supported all my children. They were taught to work hard, and the teacher kept motivating them when they accomplished their goals. The teacher never gives up pushing students. In the long run, I know that their academic sacrifices will all pay off.

For Tina, having access to teachers and staff was among the most important reasons to select a secondary charter school. They provided personalized attention to students that helped boost their confidence. She detailed,

I believe that I chose the charter school because of the personalization and support that my daughter would receive from her teachers, giving her the ability to be confident in her studies and life. Although my child worked hard every

night, Charter B teachers and staff have been by her side and are truly instrumental in her success. I can't thank the staff enough for her help and how college has not been as difficult because of its foundation.

Sibling preference. The benefit of having a sibling already attending a secondary charter school emerged as another practical reason for parents when making a school choice. Sibling preference is defined as eligibility due to a brother or sister who applied to the lottery for admission. The requirement for an eligible sibling applicant is to share at least one biological parent or one legitimate guardian and have no active expulsion on the school record. Several parents made additional selections for a secondary charter school on the enrollment application to take advantage of sibling privilege, a plus for facilitating the admission of their other children. For instance, Francisca recalled how she counted on sibling privilege for the enrollment of her younger children.

The system guarantees enrollment for the siblings of a current child enrolled in the system. The process of me registering was not complicated because of my firstborn. The rest of my children were qualified through sibling preference, which was less stressful for us. We wanted to make sure that all of our children attended the same school.

Melissa also took advantage of the sibling preferences option for her younger children. She commented,

Although it was a typical enrollment process after my first child was able to get into the lottery and [I] saw that she was getting a good education, I was very excited because it would be easier to enroll my other two children. While the requirements are the same, I believe the school should take on families in which they already know their backgrounds. I have gotten to know other mothers and their kids, and my children all know their classmates. I think this is great for school culture. Everyone has each other's backs, just like a family.

Mila supported the sibling preferences enrollment option and was able to get her other children enrolled at the same campus.

For a family, it is convenient and a reassurance that all our children will be at the same school. Sibling preferences allow us to know that the school will enable us to enter the selection process. I think it is good for the school and the families to enroll entire families.

Research Question Two

What strategies do Latino parents use when selecting secondary public charter schools for their children?

To better understand the Latino parents' selection of a secondary charter school, it was necessary to identify their strategies. Strategy refers to an action, practice or method of achieving the desired goal, which is to choose a school in this study. When selecting secondary public charter schools for their children, several shared strategies used by Latino parents surfaced from the data. According to the parents, using a "familial"

approach was one strategy that meant relying on family and friend networks to learn about the charter school. Other approaches included visiting the campus before selecting and searching information from campus and district websites and campus brochures and flyers.

Family and friends network. The data suggested that participating parents strongly relied on family and friends for information, resource gathering, and navigating the charter schools' selection processes. In this regard, their networking proved to be a promising strategy. When Latino parents engage in communication and interaction with familial individuals, they can develop personal and social contacts needed to obtain the necessary details to make an informed decision. These can include learning about the expectations of secondary charter schools, reward systems for student success; various support initiatives offered by campus administrators, teachers, counselors and others; and academic programs, as well as extracurricular activities. Family networks may include parents, children, relatives, family, personal friends and alumni.

Maribel sought to gain information regarding the charter school from her nephew. She recalled,

As we looked at school options, I kept my nephew's personal experience while at Charter A in mind. I called him up and told him that we were considering the campus and asked him the most important things while he was a student. He then said that although it was much work, he started feeling successful, motivating him to do better. He was encouraged to follow their expectations, and they too were

providing incentives when he was accomplishing small goals. We all saw the change in him. Those teachers did not give up on him.

Neighborhood friends with children already enrolled in a charter school were also part of the network and shared their research and personal experiences. Florencia remembered,

After observing the students and campus happenings, I decided to learn more about the school from my friends. They had all had different reasons why they chose Charter B, but the number one thing they all mentioned was the willingness of the staff to do whatever it takes for the students and families. They gave me examples of how the principal, front office, teachers, and counselors support their children. I proceeded to ask more questions, and they each gave me examples of the type of support that included tutorials, college counseling, and social and emotional resources they provided at parent meetings. I remember one friend saying that although Charter B is not perfect, no other traditional public school can support your child as this school can.

Similarly, Tina and José reached out to their niece while deciding whether to select Charter B. Reflecting on their conversations, Tina proclaimed,

My niece, Ivonne, was a graduate of Charter B and a college graduate and was instrumental in sending our three children to the campus. She was a great student who soared academically and in extracurricular activities while at Charter B. She was able to talk to my daughter, who was wanting to go into nursing, and us. She

informed us of the academic commitment that was necessary and what classes she should take. Ivonne also told my daughter that she should always reach out to her teachers when she has questions for support. Her information was helpful and motivated my daughter to attend.

As a family, spouses and children are often part of the network. Melissa remembered wanting to make sure her entire family supported her decision. She recalled,

My husband and I talked to our children and told them that we want this school for them. When discussing the school option with our daughter, her initial reaction was that she heard that it was challenging, and then told her not to let the rigorous academic expectations keep her from obtaining these opportunities [that] are not always offered in too many other schools.

While some parents experienced a charter school education themselves, they still valued discussing the decision with their spouses for confirmation and support. Melly explained,

We are glad that we decided to register our students at the school. We have both observed the learning progress of all our children. The reputation of excellent teachers and academics is evident in everything they do. Along with my husband, we both felt that our children would not receive the same learning experience in a traditional public school. We are proud to say that the teachers often communicate with our children and update us on academic progress and other issues.

In-person campus visits. According to the data, in-person campus visits surfaced as an instrumental strategy to facilitate the selection process. Ostensibly, on-site visits appear to boost knowledge and comfort levels of the campus and make it possible for students and parents to be exposed to campus culture, which is a great way to become better informed of everyday practices of the school, staff and students. Most parents expressed an eagerness to visit the campus personally before selecting their school choice. Parents' first impressions of the school's personnel and campus tended to be positive. Campus visits allow parents to directly observe the physical appearance of the school's facilities, such as cleanliness and orderliness. Recalling her campus visit, Alicia proclaimed,

It was essential for me to visit the school. The school was beautiful, had a small setting, and took a tour to see all parts of the school during the visit. We saw the classrooms, cafeteria, the shared outdoor space and noticed that the school was very clean. Everyone from the front office to the student leading the tour was very friendly and informative. The student provided his perspective on how he initially was not bought into the campus and then began making better grades and more focused on his studies. Listening to the student informed me that the school was doing a good job if a student could be that reflective.

Campus visits also allow parents and their children to personally and informally meet and interact with teachers, thus allowing parents to observe how the teachers might relate to their children. This interaction exhibits a high level of commitment to ensure that

students are successful at the school and beyond. Marina met and observed the teachers during a campus visit before deciding to select the charter school over her neighboring traditional public school. Marina commented,

During my campus visit, a teacher introduced herself and a high school senior before taking us on a personal tour. I remember that the student was inspiring, and the teacher also committed to the staff being there for my son's educational journey beyond high school. That was a huge decision on why I chose Charter B for my son. Their words were put into action while my son was in college. He received a card from several teachers at the university. One teacher also visited his college cohort of other Charter B students while on vacation. This cohort became my son's family. They went through growing pains together while at the university, took turns traveling back home, and, as parents, we sent groceries, homemade tortillas, and food.

Some of the participating parents were alumna of Charters A and B and walked the hallways as students. From their remarks, it became clear that by revisiting the campus, their lived experiences were confirmed. Memories evoked were of the school's environment, work ethic, welcoming atmosphere, and the pride felt for school-related accomplishments featured in the school's display cases. Melly explained her experience going back to the campus.

When I walked into the campus, it just brought old memories; although some things had changed, many things were also similar. There was still an essence of work ethic and family that was there. They made me feel welcome, and the visit reminded me that everything is earned and good things can happen through hard work. The walls had inspirational quotes, the campus was bright, colorful, and student work was displayed all around. I knew this was where I wanted my kids to attend.

Internet and social media searches. Another strategy that surfaced from the data was the use of technology to search the internet. As a known global network, the internet provides parents with various types of informational devices comprised of interconnected tools that depend on specific communication protocols or forms. The world wide web facilitates communication of the schools' educational practices and allows parents the ease of navigation to learn more about the enrollment process. These various online tools provide parents with extensive information about the many aspects of charter schools. It is also important to note that not all families have access to internet technology. Illiana remembered using this strategy to learn more about the school she was considering.

As soon as I heard about the school's high academic performance, I went online to see the school's website. It gave me all kinds of information that I was able to use when choosing the campus. The website provided me with information on the school's academic ratings and the number of students enrolled in the school calendar. The most important parts for me as a parent was all the services they

had for families and the process for how I was to enroll my child. I needed to know what I had to do to apply for the campus. Everything was right there. The school pages answered many of my questions.

Many parents have conversations with family members about a charter school they are preferring, which prompts a search on the school's website for pertinent details that may direct them to current students, the lottery process, school requirements or resources. For example, Elisa recalled that her husband immediately pulled up the campus website when she conferred with him.

My husband likes to navigate the internet and googled the campus website for more information. He found out that it was a good school and that students were doing well overall. He then began to tell me about the lottery process and what a parent had to do to enroll their child into the school. The website informed us that we would have to create an account to apply to the school. He also showed me how many students were on the campus and all the things they did to support students. It was also nice that there was a page devoted to communicating with parents and resources.

On the other hand, some parents research multiple websites in order to learn more and gain a greater comprehensive view. For example, Florencia remembered going through several schools' websites.

The websites gave my family lots of information all at once. I compared the several schools we were looking at, allowing me to talk to my son and ask for his opinion. I wanted him to learn about the schools. I did not want him to be surprised when he started school. We also noticed that we had to apply online. I had never had to do that, so that took a little bit of time. The website now has a lot more resources than it did nine years ago. Now it has lots of information on services like the food bank distributions and opportunities for service.

Research Question Three

What factors influence Latino parents' decision-making to select a secondary public charter school in a large urban district?

According to the data gathered from this research question, Latino parents' decision-making appears to be influenced by specific attributes or features of the school that may contribute to a particular result or outcome, generating a specific action. Emergent factors that influence Latino parents' decision-making in this study appear to be related to the schools' rigorous academic foundation, college preparation, student support services, home visits, and orientations.

Rigorous academic foundation. A rigorous academic foundation that conforms to high-quality education with strict academic expectations surfaced as an essential factor that leads parents to select a charter school: a balanced courseload focusing on students' academic strengths and abilities and attending to their emotional and social needs. In addition, the intent of a high-quality education offers a variety of rigorous classes to keep

students competitive when applying to colleges. Elisa recollected that searching for a school with a rigorous education was a priority for selecting a school of choice.

Everyone at the school emphasizes the importance of being an independent learner and how it will help them as college students. Our children must be exposed to others with the college-bound mindset as a parent. The staff and other parents in the school community are very attentive to my children, and I was unsure if this environment and culture would be the case in a traditional public school setting.

Reinforcing the value of a rigorous academic culture was essential to Rosa, as she mentioned,

The school wanted us to hold our children accountable for their academics and ensure that we had a pulse on learning. I remember several times that I did not understand my child's homework due to my limited English ability, but I just made sure that the assignment looked completed and organized. I would ask my daughter what she learned, and her responses were detailed and confident.

For others, a rigorous academic foundation that employs reliable methods for instructional delivery, emphasizes accountability, and provides support was an important factor. This experience was the case for Francisca, who noted,

When I started observing what my child was bringing home, it was evident that there were high academic expectations. The school emphasized college readiness

“big time.” My child was held accountable for everything she did. There were many times when the work was challenging, but she could call on her teacher and be encouraged to call each other to understand the homework better. The courses offered also suggested that my child received instruction at grade level, but she was often held to higher expectations by enrolling her in advanced classes to prepare her to go to college.

Another aspect of rigorous academics is the reputation of the school’s high-quality education and contributions made by other professionals, forming a kind of team. As Mila announced,

At Charter A, everyone is willing to support and motivate students to continue their school beyond high school. That partnership makes a great team and sets the tone for great expectations for all students.

Similarly, Alisela appreciated the campus’ reputation of holding very high expectations for the students. She said,

Although it has been tough academically and living to such high expectations, they expect a lot from my son. He now loves the school and says that there is no way that he would have ever been able to make it in a traditional public school. I’m not going to tell you it is perfect; we have always resolved any issues, and he is now going to be a senior next year.

College readiness. College readiness emerged as another critical factor when selecting a charter school: the focused and intentional effort of preparing students to pursue a college education and achieve success. According to Latino parent participants, college readiness develops skill sets that serve students once they enter college. These may include but are not limited to time management, goal setting, planning and managing work and life, solid note-taking skills, and navigating the college environment. Several parents stressed that the only way their children could become successful was to learn the intricacies of college while attending a secondary charter school. Latino parents place great importance on the most rigorous curriculum where education and college are priorities and where professional counselors are enlisted to guide and encourage students to do well. As Mila explained,

In my experience, the traditional public school setting has ineffective counselors and has enormous caseloads. That was the reason that I selected Charter A. I researched that the counselor's had assigned cohorts, and they are responsible for their academic progress monitoring and social-emotional support. I also noticed that my daughter's counselor is always available and well aware of her grades and performance in and out of school. If she struggles on course work or assessments, the counselor encourages her to retake the assignment and attempt for a better grade. This individualized support also brings in parents when necessary. They see the value of communicating with parents as they produce college-bound students.

Echoing Mila's sentiment, Rosa also described her desire to find a school to expose her child to rigorous academic requirements and provide college insights.

During the spring, my daughter was encouraged to attend a large college fair in the area. There she and her classmates were able to talk to all different college representatives about their schools. Colleges were representing many Texas schools and beyond. The representatives, many of whom were current college students themselves, gave out brochures and college items and offered suggestions on applying to college and various scholarships. In addition, many schools provided lots of information on financial aid and the number of college graduates they produce. That event was beneficial and provided my daughter with lots of information in deciding what type of university she wanted to attend.

The emphasis on graduating from high school and attending college was also a key factor and played a considerable role in Ana's decision while selecting a school of choice. Ana commented,

The focus on college preparedness was apparent, and I wanted to enroll my kids due to the focus on graduation and attendance to a four-year college. At Charter B, college preparation is the expectation for all teachers and students. In addition, the culture allows teachers to support the students and ensure their families are orientated to college expectations because many of the students are first-generation college students and need that extra exposure.

For Alicia, the number one factor in selecting a school was to immerse her firstborn in a school that offered rigorous academic programs, took pride in everything they did, and prepared them for college. She shared,

At this particular charter school, I observed that the teachers were motivated to teach and expose my children, unlike a traditional public school would. I appreciated the teachers' efforts, and although they provided a rigorous curriculum with lots of homework, I felt the incentives, such as field [trips] and college experiences, were external motivators. The trips exposed my children to new ideas, learning and opportunities.

In support of college readiness, José selected Charter B High because of its tradition of encouraging students to attend college by introducing them to college information events, such as Senior Signing Day. As José observed,

During this ceremony, all the charter students from across the city celebrate the graduating senior class. Students are then asked to come up to the podium and declare what college they will be attending in the fall. When you are in 6th grade or middle school, you see the senior class announcing their universities with banners, t-shirts, and flags, motivating them to do well in school. They are encouraged to do well in school to declare what college or university they will be attending.

Campus core values. A central focus that is upheld by the principles as their mission and vision and reflect the campus' collective ability of all stakeholders—students, parents, teachers and staff—to communicate and actively participate in a way that demonstrates who they are, what they stand for, and why it matters. Having a solid set of core values on campus affirms the school's foundational beliefs, principles, and culture and helps guide community behavior. Parents emphasized the significance of practicing core values on campus and at home as a way of exercising effective communication.

Alicia recalled how the school not only introduced her to their core values but ensured that everyone observed them.

My children had to learn the campus's core values and use them on campus, but I also noticed they lived to Charter A's values at home. I liked that my children value respect, hard work, working with others, and determination during school and at home with their families in college and life. It is good to see that they are learning behaviors that I, too, want to see in them.

Francisca also remembered that core values were emphasized.

I liked that the teacher, teacher assistant, and even the principal stressed the core values and why it was necessary to follow them in school, class, and life. Students practiced the importance of respecting others and working hard every day. The core values stood for principles that I was aligned to at home and school alike.

The data revealed that charter schools' core values guide their stakeholders' actions and behaviors during regular school operations, especially during difficult times, tragic events, or natural disasters. For example, during the devastation of Hurricane Harvey, Florencia witnessed the entire school community coming together to help one another.

During the catastrophic storm, my family lost everything due to high waters and flooding. Immediately the school personnel called and asked how we were. They soon started to get supplies, and along with the campus principals, staff, and upper-class students, they began to empty my flooded home and broke down the wet sheetrock from the walls. I remember they not only assisted financially but demonstrated that they were part of their family. After a long day of work, we had a bar-b-que and ate together. We all were very united and knew how special it was to help one another.

José and Tina gained insight from their niece, Ivonne, about students who learn and adapt to the essential morals and behaviors of the school become better students and people overall. José stressed that participation in a school's cultural activities and traditions is just a part of the school's core values.

I am very proud that my daughter is part of school culture and traditions, such as the rites of passage from one student to another. It is tradition for a graduating senior to hand a yellow rose to a rising student. The rose symbolizes legacy and

that they too will one day be graduates of the school. I have seen that this shows students that their place as students matters and builds community and family.

Based on her own experience as an alumnus, Alisela also selected the school because it emphasized academic rigor and responsibility. As she observed,

The teachers and students teach the students to be responsible for their learning and learn from their mistakes. The importance of becoming self-learners, holding to high expectations, and getting to college were ones that we had not seen in a traditional public school setting. We wanted to embrace what the school stood for and trust that my two children would be better for it.

Student support and services. Purposeful professional actions that provide assistance and aid to students beyond regular classroom teaching (i.e., social, emotional, or food insecurities) emerged as significant factors for Latino parents when selecting a charter school. For example, the two secondary public charter schools have comprehensive support systems that were enacted by professional counselors, administrators and consultants from the district, and include emotional health assistance in small groups or one-on-one counseling; it is not uncommon for students and their families to receive food contributions, gift cards and other essential household items during traumatic times. These schools may also have provided monetary aid, tools or manual labor assistance to help families overcome hardships beyond schooling.

Aware that the charter school offers more than excellent instruction, Melissa recalled when the school provided services beyond the curriculum. She commented,

It has been my experience that the administrators and teachers provide a safe, secure, and drama-free environment for students and parents. At Charter B, there is more respect for everything. I know that other traditional public schools do not offer the same academic and support services. When we were at the other campus, if my child needed help, the teacher did not support them individually; they would only assist in groups. The culture was not as great, and they did not provide many extracurricular activities for their students, which adds fun to a challenging academic day. I like that my child has different activities to choose from after school.

Alisela also referenced the advantage of having access to additional student support and related services as a factor that influenced her selection of the charter school.

My husband and I thought that my son would receive more opportunities and services in Charter B. However, when we mentioned that we were enrolling him at the school, my son cried about going there. He had heard of the school's reputation and was scared that it would be too harsh for him. Although initially, he did not want to attend Charter B, he grew into a well-disciplined student who received extra attention from teachers and constant support from the staff. We

love it when and if the teachers notice any changes with the students at school or home, and they easily reach out to us for support.

Alisela continued, as she reflected on the change she sees in her son's educational pathway from the support he received from campus teachers and staff beyond his academics.

The school provides the student with very different support systems. For example, two years ago, my son's grandmother passed, and the school counselor was available to meet with him. Another example we recently went through was the February 2021 winter freeze. During the storm, the school counselor and staff contacted us and brought us water. I was very grateful and thought that the type of service is like taking care of the entire child. We have many friends who hear about how the school provides many benefits for their students and want to be part of the Charter B family.

Thinking of her goal to place her children in a school where academic and other support would be available during school hours and challenging times, Melly recalled the COVID-19 pandemic. Her son was not adjusting well, was highly disengaged, and not speaking to anyone, so she contacted his teacher for additional help.

I reached out to my son's teacher; they had seen the same type of change in his behavior and began providing extra support services. After receiving services, I was informed by his teacher that she was proud of my son for making the highest

jump on MAP testing in the 2nd grade. However, after talking to a friend who has two kids on a traditional public school campus, this attention that my son received would not [have] happen[ed] as quickly [if he were in public school] due to the number of students they serve and teachers that may not be equipped to service students in the same way.

Parent engagement. Charter school parents' active participation in their children's education emerged as a vital factor in selecting a school. Parent engagement comes in various forms, from attending meetings to actively participating in the education process through volunteerism and attending parent engagement sessions. Most parents expressed appreciation for having space on campus to volunteer, contribute to the school's future, and directly observe best instructional practices employed by teachers.

Effective parent engagement illustrates how influential parents can be and the pride they take in volunteering. It also sends a positive message to their children of how invested their parents are in their education. Maribel noted,

As a parent, I believe that parents are the glue to ensure that students learn from their teachers. I observed teachers and learned how to better support my children and others through my volunteering experience in Charter A. I have seen a teacher's impact as a parent and how they leave the last impression in students' lives every day. I also believe that students are motivated when they see parents volunteering and participating in the educational process. If a school is to be excellent, there has to be a set of expectations for students, teachers,

administration, and parents. At Charter A, I was once told by the campus principal that parents are his ears and eyes and that he wanted to hear from us. As a result, the principal allowed us to be part of the campus, becoming an academically recognized campus.

Parent engagement on campus-specific initiatives takes a variety of forms during the school day. However, volunteerism appears to be the most common way for parents to provide extra human resources where they can make a significant contribution to their children's education and the school as a whole. Marina recollected seeing a high level of communication, emphasizing volunteerism, hard work and excellence after having her second child enrolled in the charter.

I know that if my daughter needs anything, there is someone on that campus that can support her. As a campus volunteer, I can help the staff by observing them and helping my child at home. It is not only the teacher's responsibility to educate the students. We must work together and support these first-generation students so they can achieve their goals.

By facilitating in-person parent engagement, the school empowers families to be active partners in their children's education. During the Covid-19 pandemic, however, schools had to get creative and had parents meet virtually to continue offering assistance to other parents. Melissa detailed,

I believe that a campus must empower parents and encourage them to volunteer via parent meetings. I appreciate the specialized classes offered to parents to inform us about upcoming events and opportunities. During the COVID-19, we are meeting online, and it is not the same. I like talking to other parents and receiving information from the school.

From the parents' perspective, engagement requires careful thinking: what it means to get involved and assist when various opportunities arise. How the school connects and communicates their volunteer needs to the parents can also determine the extent of parent engagement. The parents from Charter B appreciated spending time listening to other parent's experiences, as Illiana stated,

I like that the school is always keeping parents informed through meetings, emails, phone calls, and whenever there is an issue. There is always a speedy response time. My experience is that the communication between the school and parents is sporadic in a traditional public school. At Charter B, they go the extra effort to work with students and their families alike. The school has monthly parent meetings on specific topics that are relevant to us. This forum is an opportunity for us to participate and share our experiences with other parents.

Home visits and orientations. Home visits emphasize that schools care and aspire to build two-way communication by reaching out to families in a personal way to welcome them into the school. Staff, teachers, administrators and current students attempt

to establish intellectual and emotional connections with new students and their families that afford them the opportunity to learn more about the school, the people and the academic and personal support during tenure at the campus and through college. However, the 2020 pandemic changed this gesture, forcing both charters to substitute electronic conferencing via zoom so that teams could continue the tradition of connecting with families for that initial personal time. The effect that home visits offered was highly valued as an outreach effort from the schools. Parents appreciated the opportunity to have school staff visit them in their own homes.

Melly reminisced about being excited about the possibility of having her family join the school system and take part in an initial home visit.

During our home visit, teachers and staff visited my family at my home, introduced themselves and shared data regarding the school, reviewed the academic and cultural expectations of signing a contract, and left campus swag behind for the student. This act, in the family's opinion, showed dedication to school and family partnership.

Some parents see home visits as confirmation that their decision to select the school is right for their children. For example, Florencia mentioned the tradition of a home visit to affirm that she made the right decision to enroll her daughters.

The home visit by teachers, admin, and current students touched my heart. The visit to my home from the team demonstrated that my daughters mattered, that I

mattered, and more importantly, my family mattered. The principal gave my daughter two nails during the visit, “dos clavitos,” each with the schools’ colors. The principal then went to explain the significance of the nails. The first nail will display her high school diploma from Charter B, and the other nail would display her college diploma. That gesture symbolized the goals for my daughters. It was emotional and inspiring to know that they would be part of a school expecting the very best from them.

The timing of a home visit effectively conveys the schools’ willingness to come together with families and discuss school rules before academic activities are initiated. This sends the message that the roles of parents and families and their level of participation are valued as essential before the start of school. As Mila recalled, home visits “... sent a message to me of what the school valued, and played a role on how parents participate in home visits before their children begin their time at Charter B.” She further elaborated,

During the home visit, the administration, students, and teachers all discuss how the charter school will constantly provide quality education and discipline. They gave us examples of how we were to succeed through all seven years at Charter B. They shared data on the school and on the number of students that had graduated from college already. I liked that they shared the information and communicated everyone’s responsibility to ensure that my child got the best education possible.

Home visits demonstrate the schools' high commitment to bringing all stakeholders together by familiarizing parents with their responsibilities to uphold the schools' core values and understand their expectations. Maribel explained,

The school staff and family were all invited into my house, and we introduced each other and brought a bag with a shirt and other school items. The teacher and a current student were both at my home. We sat down and reviewed the core agreements for learning. The teacher, my child, and my husband, and I all signed the contracts. It was a list of responsibilities we each had while my child attends school. I liked that we were all listening to each other's responsibilities, especially listening to the teacher and their expectations and commitment.

Initial meetings and orientation sessions also emerged as critical factors in selecting a charter school. These sessions have the potential to send a strong message from the principal and others that if a student has "ganas," or the will and desire to get ahead, they will indeed succeed. In Melissa's experience, for instance, she observed how the entire charter district rallied for her child's education by offering motivation and academic resources.

I was very encouraged when the principal told my child that they could meet these expectations by working hard and organizing themselves every day. I can truly connect to other families' experiences at the first parent meeting I ever attended. Students have access to meeting with teachers beyond the school day and can

attend tutorials. Teachers did not just tell this at the initial meeting; teachers live those expectations every day.

According to the participants, after being selected in the lottery, parents are invited to an orientation where the principal and staff further inform them about the schools' academic expectations. Ana remembered,

The school administrator and teachers emphasized that a goal was to expose students to a rigorous education and prepare them for college in the next seven years. They went on to say that my child would visit colleges and participate in various opportunities. This information and more about the school's data and student responsibility were again mentioned during home visits.

Orientations also illustrated the staff's commitment and willingness to meet with parents in different formats, such as small groups to review specific academic and behavioral expectations for clear communication and then sharing insights. Alicia expounded,

As a parent, I appreciate meeting with the principal and teachers. The small setting provided a clear line of communication for what my [son] would need to achieve academically and socially. I remember telling the Charter A staff that the K-12 campus structure provided stability for [all] my children, not needing to travel to several campuses and enroll in different schools as if one would in a traditional public school setting. I also told them that we were together and that I

wanted to hear from them if my children were not meeting the school's expectations. The principal thanked me and reassured me that they would support and ensure that my children received the best education [and] get [my son] to and through college.

Research Question Four

How do Latino parents decide to enroll their children in secondary public charter schools?

The final area of this study focused on Latino parents' decision-making to enroll their children in a secondary public charter school. Making a decision refers to an action or process by which two or more products or alternatives are considered and analyzed to make a particular product or outcome. As such, having clarity when considering potential choices is of great value when finally choosing the best course or option. Three main themes associated with decision-making emerged from the data: conferring with the family's network, attending informational meetings, and comparing gathered information.

Conferring with family members. Conducting conversations with family and relatives was a necessary part of the decision-making process for the Latino parents who participated in the study. As parents decide to enroll their children in a charter school, the exchange of feelings, ideas and opinions can be beneficial, and reinforce the familial bond that shapes Latino parents' perspectives and actions regarding family matters. This intimate connection emerged as a top influencer when family members were about to

make as important a decision as their children's lifetime of education. Conferring with family usually occurred prior to application or enrollment and involved parents, adult relatives, and the children being affected by the decision. Rosa explained,

My husband liked the option that our daughter would have an opportunity to attend a school with the reputation of being a good school. After discussing the choice, I then wanted to make sure my daughter was involved in the process. Although she had heard the school was very rigorous, she was challenged and determined to excel, and I wanted her to be invested. If I spoke to her about enrolling on the campus, I felt that she would be more interested in doing an excellent job while a student there.

Mila recalled the discussion with her family network during the decision-making process to enroll her children.

My husband and I make all the decisions together. I researched the information about the school, and [we] sat down together to figure out if that was the best school for our children. We looked at the website that included information on registration, the enrollment process, academic ratings, and we went to look at the number of students attending the school.

Some parents visited the school and spoke to staff, students and counselors, then felt the need to discuss the enrollment process with their spouses and children. Marina explained,

I knew that deciding on a school for my son was a very serious one, one that would not only be the next seven years in middle school and high school but later in college and life. Both my husband and I knew that the decision would possibly impact the type of school he got into after high school. We talked about the benefits of enrolling our eldest and then spoke to him. We wanted it to be a decision where we were all prepared to make it work. And thanks to God, it did. He got a full ride to a university in Ohio, and he is working hard to make good grades.

Attending informational meetings. Another important detail that emerged from the data underscored parents' attendance at meetings and informational sessions. This required paying close attention to the essential components of the charter schools' requirements, offerings, expectations and the like. The meetings appeared to be set in functional spaces to inform and collaborate with families and students. During the meetings, school leaders provided a clear agenda in which all stakeholders—administrators, teachers, students and families—worked together to develop solid and cohesive communication.

Both charter schools in the study used informational meetings to set the stage for students and parents to utilize platforms that communicated academic and cultural expectations to the community. Parents had the opportunity to share what they knew about campus expectations and corroborate that the school practiced what it preached during the school year. In addition to physically observing the campus, parents attended

informational meetings to hear from other parents regarding their experience. Alisela added,

As a parent, I liked how the school, including current students and parents, communicated their expectations before starting school. I found that their commitment to us from the beginning of the informational meeting has not changed. What was mentioned in the meeting is what the entire school community puts into practice. I have found no issues at Charter A compared to what I experienced in other traditional public school settings. However, they made it sound like they would support my child one hundred percent, and they did not provide her what was needed.

Another parent, Ana, who attended an informational meeting to gain relevant details before selecting a school, commented,

The meetings were informative regarding the school structure, and they gave details on the enrollment and lottery process. We heard from several staff members, students, and even current parents. I chose to participate in the lottery process because of the 6-12 campus structure that would allow my three children stability during their middle and high school years. In a traditional public school setting, I would have to take my children to all different schools. Therefore, I preferred that my children be with the same kids in middle and high school.

The data suggested that attending informational meetings allowed parents to gain more profound firsthand knowledge about the school, the faculty and the administration.

Meetings appeared to have served as welcoming, motivational opportunities for parents to personally see and hear testimonials about student academic success from various exhibits showcased throughout the campus. Reflecting on her own experience, Elisa remembered,

While visiting the campus and attending an informational meeting, I recall feeling welcomed and had great first impressions regarding the motivational saying on the walls, student work, and pictures of graduates. She heard from the principal, teachers, and testimonials from current parents and students during the meeting. The informational meeting included a tour provided by student guides, and I felt the groups were small enough to ask individual questions.

While attending an informational meeting, parents met and interacted with their children's teachers, principal and other campus professionals. These interactions tended to facilitate understanding of the schools' expectations and the need for parents to be collaborative partners in their child's schooling. According to Alicia's first experience, having access to the principal and teachers during the informational meeting was very encouraging. She detailed,

During the informational meeting, I heard from the principal that the administration, family, students, and teachers are all in this together. He then went

on to discuss the importance of collaboration between the teachers, students, and parents. The principal also gave examples of what we were to expect from them in supporting my child. Finally, he encouraged us to volunteer so we can learn what our students are learning. I appreciated his perspective and thought it was a great way to be involved in my child's school.

Comparing the schools. The data showed that as parents got closer to making a decision to enroll their children in a secondary charter school, another determining factor that emerged was to compare school system options between charter and traditional schools. By comparing the schools' characteristics, student support offerings, academic outcomes, reputations, school personnel accessibilities, and other aspects of charter schools, Latino parents were able to identify the advantages and benefits of enrolling their children. A comparative analysis also weighed the evidence supporting parents' goals of providing their children with the best education.

Throughout the study, parents shared their perspectives on student services made available in the charter schools but were not available in the traditional public schools. Melly described how her son was directly impacted by Charter A's testing service and the subsequent support he received for his dyslexia.

My son had always had a hard time with school in the traditional public school setting. It wasn't until I enrolled my son into Charter A when the teachers started providing individual help. When they began to assist him, they informed me that they would like to test him for dyslexia. After testing, they told me that he

qualified and provided more support to assist in the learning. I started seeing a difference in his studies, and he was more confident and willing to do the work. I still wonder if he would have been diagnosed in his traditional public school setting. I still think that if he would have stayed with them, he would not have received the help he needed and would not have grown as much.

During the interviews, a significant number of parents disclosed that they enrolled their children in a charter school because they felt their children would get “lost” in a large urban secondary setting, where the personalization of academic and social services was lacking. Mila concurred and offered this account:

At Charter A, I appreciated that the counselors each had a small group of students to help with academics, grades, and social and emotional learning. I don’t think that a traditional counselor with a large student body would worry about the students like they do at this school. I know that counselors are too busy doing administrative things in schools with many students and not spending enough time with students. At Charter A, I feel there is a sense that everyone is looking out for each other, including other parents and students.

It was also Ellyse’s experience in both charter and large traditional public school settings that she was able to denote the differences between the support offered to her child with this explanation.

The best school and teachers are at Charter B. Ever since I enrollment my child in 6th grade, I have been very satisfied with the attention and access to the rigorous

curriculum they give to every student. From my own experience in a traditional public school setting, I know that students' services and support are impactful.

The staff here knows every child, every family. That is a great feeling.

During the study, parents across the board unanimously agreed that the reason for enrolling their children in a charter school versus a traditional public school was greatly influenced by the personal commitment and accessibility of the teachers, principal and staff. Florencia added,

At Charter B, we were a team. The teacher, son, and I all are in this together. I have found that, unlike a traditional public school, this school makes sure to keep us informed on any upcoming events, and they are always there to answer any questions we might have. That means the world to me. As a parent, the words that the teachers say and write to my child truly motivates them and lifts them. I also learn with other mothers during parent meetings, including sessions on ESL or computer classes. All of this shows that even the principal and all school members are dedicated to the entire family. I don't hear of this type of involvement from the school personnel in the larger public schools.

Summary

This chapter addressed the findings from this study using collected data from fifteen parents who participated in the study. This qualitative study examines factors that influenced parents to select a secondary public charter school rather than a traditional public school for their children. Interviews focused on parents' decision-making

processes and what they viewed as priorities when selecting a campus. Parents from two TEA 'A' rated campuses were invited by their school administrators to participate in the study. After conducting the interviews and reviewing transcripts and supplemental documents, seven overarching themes emerged: 1) quality of rigorous education, 2) school setting structure, 3) teacher and staff dedication, 4) family and friend networks, 5) school culture, 6) academic and educational opportunities, and 7) student and parent support services. The following chapter summarizes the study's analysis and conclusions, implications for practice, and recommendations for further research.

Chapter V: Summary, Discussion, Implications, and Conclusion

Charter schools have become an essential option for parents who aspire to ensure that their children benefit from better education, particularly for Latino parents. However, the reason why and how these parents choose such an option is not as evident in the literature. This study's intention is to add Latino parents' voices to the literature regarding decision-making when selecting a charter school for their children. This chapter presents a summary of the study with a brief account of the nature of the study, a summary of the findings in connection to the extant literature, implications for both practice and future inquiry, and concluding remarks.

Summary of the Study

The emergence and promise of a school choice give parents the ability to navigate and research various options not available twenty years ago. Given the increased interest in charter schools, this study attempts to illuminate Latino parents' perspectives and decision-making practices associated with certain considerations or factors when selecting a charter school. This study examined Latino parents' decision-making in secondary charter schools within Texas's large urban school district. Latino parents' motivation to enroll their children in secondary public charter schools instead of a traditional public secondary school is also included in this study. The following four questions were addressed in the study:

- 1) Why do Latino parents select a secondary public charter school over traditional public schools in a large urban school district?

- 2) What strategies do Latino parents use when selecting secondary public charter schools for their children?
- 3) What factors influence Latino parents' decision-making to select a secondary secondary public charter school in a large urban district?
- 4) How do Latino parents decide to enroll their children in secondary public charter schools?

Qualitative research guidelines were used to uncover Latino parents' voices. The intent was to determine the "Main concerns of subjects and the behaviors they use to resolve their main concerns" (Artinian, 2009, p. 3). The study was conducted with two purposefully selected public charter schools, one middle and one high school, in a large urban school district. Fifteen Latino parents were chosen to participate according to specific criteria that included fourteen mothers and one father. Of these, six represented the middle school, and nine represented the high school. The primary data sources included interviews with the participants and document reviews. Data analysis was completed by following an inductive process to generate relevant themes addressing each area of focus.

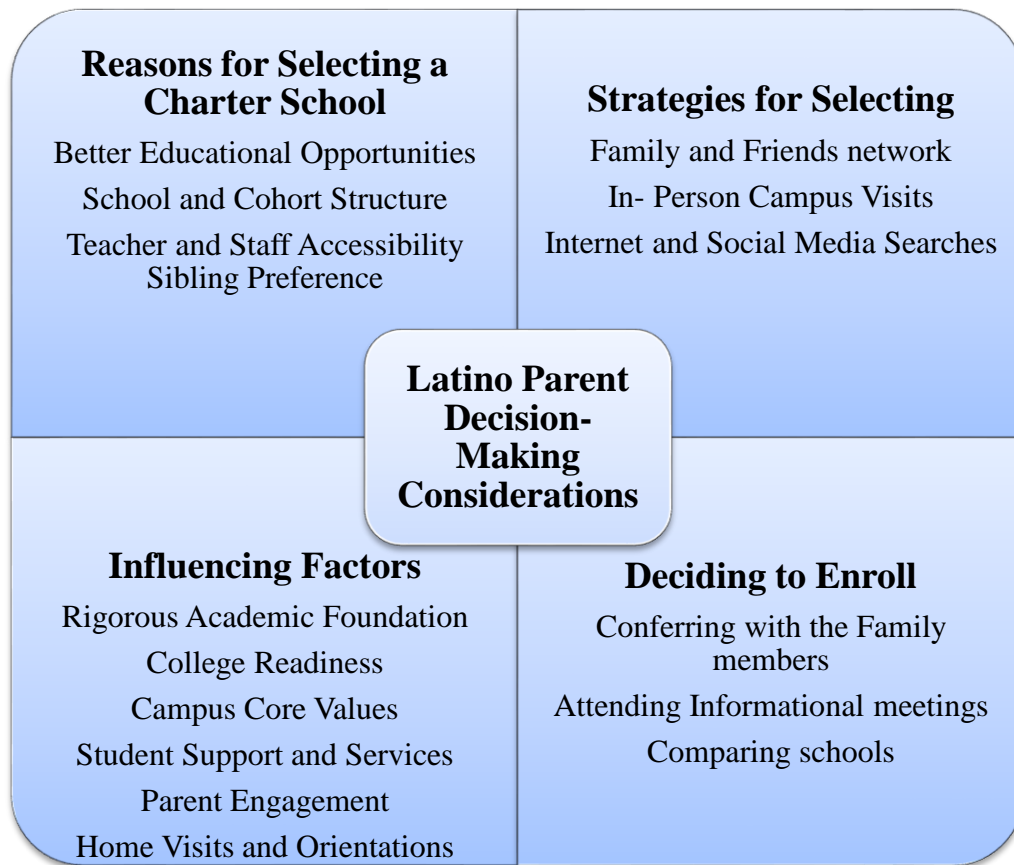
Summary of the Findings

The study's findings are organized according to the four research questions. First, it is evident from the data that Latino parents' decision-making when choosing a secondary public charter is multi-dimensional. As such, the study takes into account the quality and rigorous education offered by charters, potential benefits of the school setting

and classroom structure, accessibility to dedicated teachers and staff, contributions of family and friend networks, exposure to school culture characteristics, and access to academic and educational opportunities that offer additional support services to students and parents.

Throughout the study, participating parents were able to conceptualize what they believed to be necessary for their children's education, their personal experience regarding a public school option, the possibility of an alternative school setting, and the secondary public charter school characteristics that influenced their selection, as well as the decision for enrollment as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1- Latino Parent Decision-Making Considerations



Thus, while the background of Latino parents might be different to some extent, a commonality of experiences emerged while exercising school choice options for their children. In addition, many everyday factors were revealed concerning how parents viewed the traditional public schools within their communities and the secondary public charter schools that their children attended.

Reasons for Latino Parents' Selection of a Charter School

Access to a better education. Latino parents aspire to provide better educational opportunities for their children and search for school environments that motivate and challenge them to pursue academic success. In essence, as parents reflect on their own educational experiences, evidence shows that their decision-making are motivated by the desire for their children to reach higher levels of education. This is congruent with the literature regarding opportunities for enrolling a student in a charter school. For instance, based on a comparison of charter school parents, Mavrogordato and Stein (2016) and Mawene and Ball (2018) reported that Latino parents have high expectations of their children's academic achievements, plus the strategies and approaches charter schools to take to better respond to parents' concerns and interests in providing a better education for their children. In addition, Bulkley (2011) confirms this view with the assertion that school choice offers better educational opportunities for low-income students allowing for innovative academic, social, and fiscal practices.

Further, as Kleitz et al. (2000) concluded, Latino parents are interested in a better education for their children and place a high value on "education quality" when choosing a charter school, proportionate to their Anglo peers. This study echoes The National Council of La Raza's support of Latino parents' interest in better education for their children and prioritizes educational achievement and higher education for more Hispanics (Gross, 2014). Latino parents share a clear rationale when selecting a secondary public charter school. School and classroom structure, teacher and staff accessibility, academic

support and resources, and sibling preferences, also known as sibling privilege or legacy, emerge as the most prevalent reasons for better educational opportunities for their children.

School and cohort structure. How schools and classrooms are organized and/or structure is a critical reason Latino parents select secondary charter schools. The charter schools in this study were strategically set up to receive only 120 students per generation, making each incoming class or “generation” small enough for students to be in a classroom setting where support and one-on-one relationships with their teachers were possible. In addition, due to the small cohort settings, counselors could provide academic, social, and emotional support to individual students, thus promoting closer interactions between students, staff, and peers. It can be deduced that having positive interactions promotes a sense of family, which bonds everyone in the school.

The results align with the literature, asserting that school and classroom sizes are essential considerations when selecting a charter. For instance, Mawene and Ball (2018) indicate that structural factors heavily influence parents’ selection of schools and address parents’ desire for personalized learning for their children. This study also supports Pedroni’s (2007) notion that school size is a characteristic that many associates with individualized learning opportunities and believe teachers are more responsive to their students. Similarly, Beabout and Cambre (2013) denote that school and class sizes are a priority for families when enrolling in a school; this indicates parents’ belief that

choosing a school with a smaller student-staff ratio will focus on stronger student-student relationships.

Teacher and staff accessibility. Having access to teachers and staff emerged as another critical aspect for considering a charter school. Certain conditions, such as language barriers and the lack of familiarity with specific content, can make checking their children's homework difficult for parents. If, however, parents are confident that the teachers will be available to assist them – before, during, and after school – then their motivation for helping can be rationalized. The findings reveal that good communication and teacher availability and support are difficult to acquire at large public urban schools. Furthermore, the possibility of facing language barriers in the charter schools that parents selected to enroll their children was minimal. This contrasts with earlier research suggesting that parents encounter difficulties due to language barriers; for instance, Oakes and Lipton (2006) and Valdés (1996) claim that language barriers can make it difficult for parents to communicate effectively with teachers, administrators, and school staff.

Sibling preference. Parents also consider the benefit of having more than one child enrolled in the charter school, and sibling privilege facilitates the admission of additional students to the selected school. Both Charters A and B, in the study, grant preference to siblings who enroll in the school to keep students and families together, which also facilitates the process of selection and enrollment. Sibling preferences promote parent involvement in the school and are a way for families to share similar academic and cultural expectations and experiences. This finding adds to the body of

literature regarding Latino parents' consideration for a secondary public charter school for their children and is a critical reason for Latino parents' selection. At the time of this study, little to no information regarding sibling preference was found.

Strategies Used by Latino Parents to Select a Charter School

The findings suggest that Latino parents enact multiple and specific strategies when selecting a secondary public charter school. The most effective strategy appears to be family and friend networks, campus visits prior to choosing a school and using the internet and social media. This is congruent with a study report by Teske et al. (2006), which indicates that parents tend to use multiple sources and strategies to make a well-informed school selection decision.

Family and friends network. A robust familial network that promotes multifaceted conversations reflects an effective strategy used by Latino parents. Such networking involves family, friends and other parents in the community who serve as resources when inquiring about other parents' and students' lived experiences. Networking may include discussing potential school choices, information gathering on student academic and cultural expectations, and support systems offered by campus administrators, teachers, and counselors. This finding is in concert with Bartram's (2006) research, which discovered that parents' perceptions of accessing information often related to social networks when selecting schools for their children. Other researchers have also noted that parents' social networks are a vital source of information for their decision-making process in choosing a school (Bell, 2007; Neild, 2005; Schneider, 2001).

This echoes Bell et al. (2014) findings that immediate family members were part of the decision-making process and, in many cases, most of the children made the final decision on the school, with family members serving as their network of support in the decision.

In-person campus visit. Personal and direct observations prove to be a powerful strategy for Latino parents when considering the selection of a specific school. During campus visits, parents experienced an initial warm welcome by teachers and staff. Being physically present on the campus provides the opportunity for parents to notice students' work displayed on the walls, cleanliness of the classrooms and building, use of several multi-purpose areas, and administration interactions with the teachers and students. In addition, campus visits provide direct communication with school personnel, which is vital for information gathering. This finding is congruent with research by the Center on Reinventing Public Education at the University of Washington (2007), which found that 85% of 800 parents who were surveyed took the time to visit their potential school of choice; a possible option that contributes to better communication between parents, teachers, and administrators.

Internet and social media search. Not surprisingly, using and navigating the internet to collect information when selecting a charter school is a promising strategy for Latino parents. Parents are more readily able to compare schools, find campus performance ratings, and learn of various distinctions earned by the school or district. School websites might also include the number of students in attendance, services provided to students, and parent resource pages. In addition, parents can review the

enrollment process as many times as needed and directly apply through the lottery system, an easy process to navigate since instructions are available in Spanish. This finding is aligned with research by Lareau and Goyette (2014), who found that urban parents are likely to use the internet and other sources as determinants of school choice preferences. This echoes the theory that parents use information through various avenues, such as websites, that allow them to make reasonably well-informed choices (Buckley & Schneider, 2003; Chubb & Moe, 1990). The overwhelming research on Latino parents in this area has found that, although unfamiliar with some of the technical terms of school choice, Latino parents often reference mass media sources (e.g., radio, TV, newspapers) for school choice information (Henig, 1996).

Factors that Influence Latino Parents' Selection of a Charter School

Certain aspects, features, and characteristics emerged in this study that mirrors specific factors affecting Latino parents' choices. The most influential include a rigorous academic foundation, college readiness, core values, student support services, and home visits.

Rigorous academic foundation. A strong basis or principle supporting academic program quality appears to be one of the Latino parents' most influential factors when selecting a charter school. This includes having a curriculum that prepares students for the highest level of educational attainment, ensuring college access, and guiding students to a career pathway of their choosing. This finding is congruent with a quantitative survey that focused on white and minority parents' perceptions of what is essential when

selecting a school and highlighted the need for parents to seek rigorous core academics for their children (Delaney, 2007). The importance of academics affecting school choice decisions was also a central feature in research by Mavrogordato and Stein (2016). In addition, Ryan and Gonzalez (2016) found that high-quality teachers, college preparatory courses, the inclusion of a Latino staff, linguistic sensitivity in and around campuses, and personalized learning are essential factors for selecting a charter school.

Altenhofen, Berends, and White (2016) also assert that charter school parents consider academic quality characteristics that influence their selection of charter schools. According to their findings, Latino parents see the value of an educational program and emphasize a robust curriculum as the most prominent factor when selecting a charter school. Similarly, Zeehandelaar and Winkler (2013) emphasize that parents seek a solid curricular foundation in reading and math, along with specialization in STEM subjects. In addition, the research found that parents of various races, incomes, and political ideologies share curricular preferences.

College readiness. The strong desire to secure adequate preparation for first-generation students to be college-ready is another factor that influences Latino parents' selection of a charter school. College preparedness may include an effort to ensure that students are independent learners and thinkers, use academic and social development strategies, and are exposed to SAT/ACT examination preparations and college opportunities by attending college visits, presentations, and college fairs. This is in concert with The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (2016) report stating that

many first-generation college students enrolled in charter schools benefit from essential resources and support that prepare them for success throughout their college experience.

There was an increase in demand for college readiness opportunities in Charter A and B schools, as communicated by the participants who want their children to be college-ready. This supports the idea that college preparation refers to “Readiness to take college-level classes” (Kalsik, D. & Sprayhorn, 2018, p. 335). However, as suggested by Kalsik, D. & Sprayhorn, the complexity of preparing for college must be analyzed “to illustrate the need for college readiness measures that are sensitive to students’ varied backgrounds and college preferences” (2018, p. 335).

Campus core values. A significant factor that Latino parents take into account when selecting a school for their children is the ability to live by a set of rules and expectations at school and home. Core values are seen as essential and may include hard work, perseverance, and the ability to maintain a standard of excellence in everything they do. The study reveals that parents are very appreciative of the schools immediately communicating their core values and expectations and how they meet those expectations. In addition, Latino parents emphasize the importance of “familismo” in terms of cohesiveness and interdependence, “respeto” (respect), interpersonal relationships between young and old, and “educación,” which incorporates academic, moral, and interpersonal values of behavior and manners (Halgunseth et al., 2006). In concert with Halgunseth’s notion, it appears that the schools’ core values and Latino parents’ values – placing family and extended family needs above one’s individual needs – impact parental

decisions and behavioral practices with their children at school and at home. Century and Levy (2002) recommend creating a sustainable staff to maintain an organization's core beliefs and values (culture) and guide program adaptations over time while maintaining improved or enhanced outcomes for students.

Student support and services. Developing the whole child through specific school support services is a critical motivating factor for Latino parents when selecting a charter school. The reputation of both participating charters to provide purposeful and intentional assistance to students through tutorials, social and emotional counseling, and tools and opportunities to become prepared for college was recognized as an impactful factor. Zeelandelaar and Winkler (2013) found that it is necessary to meet different student populations' cultural and educational needs during the selection process. These authors also found it crucial for school districts, policymakers, and charter schools to develop choices for the families that offer varied interests and a diversified portfolio to provide better options that meet students' needs. Similarly, Rofes and Stulberg (2004) assert that a learning environment in charter schools of urban areas must provide flexibility for creating a vision and mission that meet the student populations' specific needs and the neighborhoods they serve. As parents become involved in school choice decision-making for their children, Blackwell (2016) recommends that parents examine the school's additional services and any partnerships they may hold with local traditional public schools.

Parent engagement. Opportunities for parents' active participation and involvement in schools reflect an instrumental factor in selecting a charter school. It appears that Latino parents have a high interest in schools that foster immediate parent engagement in a campus where their children would be educated. Parents seek schools that will promote their presence and contributions during informational meetings and related school functions. Some forms of engagement include volunteering in the classroom, attending training, current, and relevant parenting sessions, and ESL and computer classes. According to Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005), parental role construction and how parents become engaged in their children's academic performance can influence their decision. Parent engagement might be based on prior personal experiences and their social networks. In alliance with Ratcliff and Hunt's (2009) parent definition, others note that parental construction varies depending on one's own experience, resulting in a possible change of ideology or expertise that can influence parental decision-making in school selection.

However, Latino parent engagement goes beyond school walls; for instance, parents may attend charter advocacy events at the state capitol or other community events. This supports the perception that parent engagement in charter schools promotes parents' voices when selecting a charter school (Kimelberg, 2014; Posey-Maddox, 2014). In addition, this study provides evidence that Latino parents in charter schools are interested in taking every opportunity to be engaged in their children's education and are encouraged by school administrators, teachers, and counselors to be active within the

school community. As previous researchers explain, most parents have similar values and goals regarding the educational process, assist staff by volunteering and accepting leadership roles within the school community, and create connections with other parents who have a similar vision for the school (Epstein, 1995; Posey-Maddox, 2014).

Home visits and orientations. The majority of the study's parents highly valued enrolling their child in a school system where there was an intentional outreach for two-way communication between the campus and parents. Throughout the interviews, many parents commented that they appreciated the ability of school personnel to reach out personally and welcome them into the school community. Parents took pride in noting that staff, teachers, administrators, and students attempted to establish intellectual and emotional connections through traditions and various platforms such as the home visits and orientations at the beginning and throughout their tenure. These spaces allowed families to learn about the school, its people, and the academic and personal support they would provide during their time at the campus and through college. This finding adds to the scholarship regarding Latino parents' consideration for a secondary public charter school, a critical reason for Latino parents' selection. Unfortunately, in the review of the literature, little to no information regarding home visits and orientations

Decision to Enroll Children in a Charter School

Data shows that once Latino parents identify their school of choice, they consciously decide to register their children in the secondary charter school. This calls for a meeting with immediate and extended family members whom they believe to be in their

circle of influence, where they can ask questions to clarify their decision and attend meetings to confirm their gathered information and compare schools.

Conferring with the family members. Latino parents rely heavily on family networking when making impactful decisions, especially for their children. Parents consult and exchange ideas and information with nuclear and extended family members, including spouses and close relatives, such as nieces and nephews who might be alumni or current charter school students. Conversations may pertain to school information and consequences for the family when enrolling a child in a charter school, and parents consult with their children to ensure that their voices are heard when deciding to enroll them in the selected school. The Latino parents in this study deferred to someone in their family for additional information and resources. Understanding others' experiences regarding social networks is essential information for their decision-making process (Bell, 2007; Neild, 2005; Schneider, 2001).

The reliance on family members is congruent with Neild's (2005) notion that parents use social network informants to assist in school choice decisions. Even when two different sets of parents from the same socioeconomic and cultural background receive specific information, their decisions tend to be based on the network's knowledge. This study suggests that conferring with family networks is essential to enroll children in a secondary charter school, which appears to contradict earlier studies. For example, Schneider et al. (2002) found that Latino parents did not often find social

contacts helpful resources when searching for information but rather found school-based and traditional sources more helpful.

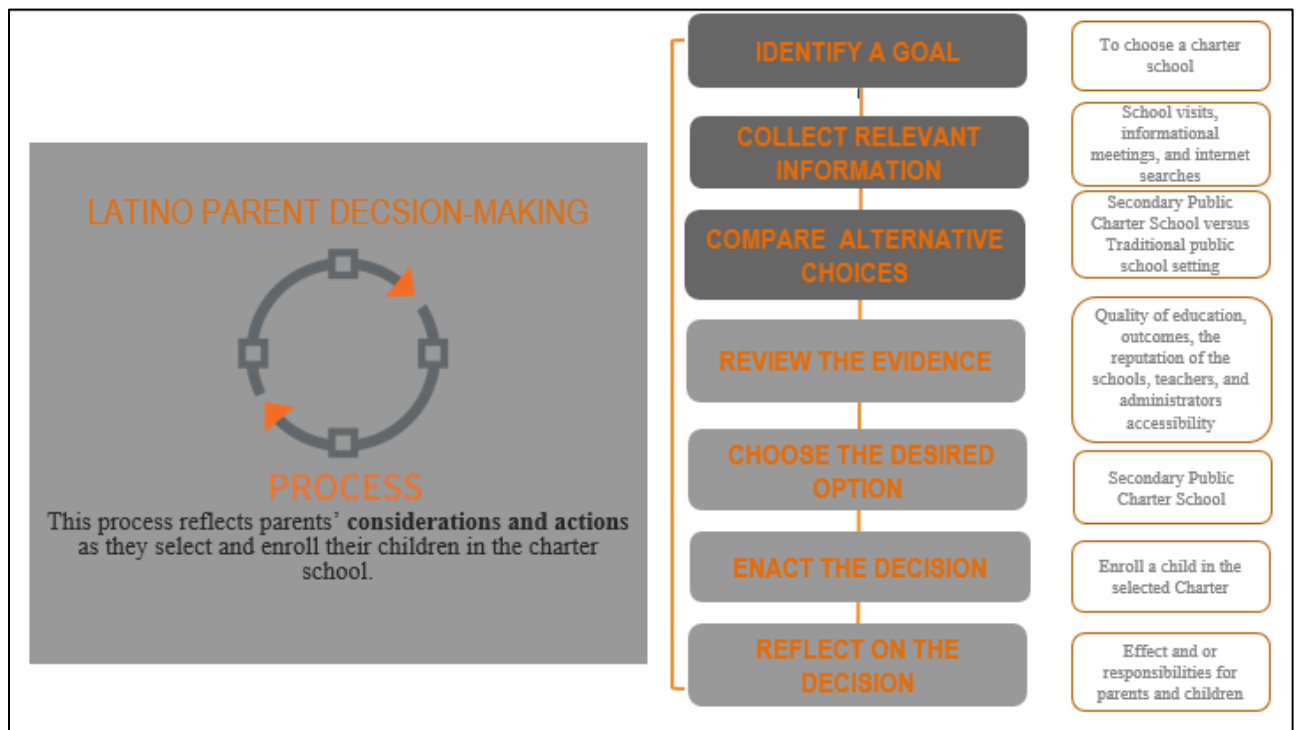
Attending informational meetings. Becoming more knowledgeable about the campus firsthand by attending informational meetings appears critical for Latino parents as they decide to enroll their children in a secondary public charter. Such meetings offer opportunities to directly learn details about the school's mission, programs, and services for both students and parents. Prior to the pandemic, attendance at information meetings and monthly parent meetings were held in person; however, COVID-19 changed that arrangement. The provision for virtual conference meetings gave parents the convenience of hearing from school administrators, teachers, counselors, staff, and parent liaisons who shared information about other events on campus. In addition, parents appreciated that meetings were bilingual, thus eliminating a void in communication, and parents were able to obtain additional information to support their decision to enroll their children. This is congruent with Kisida and Wolf's (2010) idea that communication and access to information are critical for Latino parents when selecting a charter school. While other researchers found that Latino parents experienced challenges when seeking information, such as cultural, language, and technology access barriers (Schneider et al., 1998) and access to charter school information was an obstacle for families (Garcia & Morales, 2016), findings from this study suggest otherwise. No parent indicated having difficulty communicating with staff or navigating the technology required to enroll their students.

Comparing schools. As Latino parents approach the decision to enroll their children, a comparative analysis of the public charter school and the traditional public school can be made by analyzing and reviewing the advantages and disadvantages associated with the schools' reputations and achievement data. By identifying similarities and differences, parents can develop a clear vision of the value and expectations for their engagement and the potential and actual benefits of enrolling their children in the school of their choice. As observed by others, "Added parental initiative is required to enroll one's child in a charter that may include a signed contract rather than enroll him or her in a neighborhood school" (Goodman, 2013, p. 95).

Latino Parents' Decision-Making when Selecting a Public Charter School

Collectively, the study's findings reveal that the decision-making process reflects parents' considerations and actions as they select and enroll their children in a charter school. Looking at extant literature and findings of the current study, this process appears to include: identifying a goal (choosing a charter school), collecting relevant information (school visits, informational meetings, internet searches), comparing alternative choices (secondary public charter school versus traditional public school setting), and reviewing the evidence (quality of education, outcomes, reputations of schools', teachers' and administrators' accessibility), choosing the desired option (a secondary public charter school), enacting the decision (enrolling a child in the selected charter), and reflecting on the decision (effect and/or responsibilities of parents and children). Figure 2 illustrates these stages as parents complete the selection and enrollment process.

Figure 2. Latino Parent Decision-Making Model



This emergent decision-making process reflects the importance of the parent's role and actions in selecting a school and enrolling their children. According to researchers, "Both rational and psychological decision models have people as their central element either as decision-makers or as the ones who are affected by the decision" (Oliveira, 2007, p. 14). Oliveira affirms, "Choice and behavior present the core characteristics of decision-making phenomena and involve the process of thinking and reacting" (2007, p. 16), as illustrated by the findings in this study. Furthermore, the actions or steps taken by Latino parents seem to mirror a rational decision model as defined by recent researchers. Uzonwane states that a "Rational model of decision-

making is a model where individuals use facts and information, analysis, and a step by step procedure to come to a decision” (2016, p. 1).

Implications

In reviewing the study’s focus, scope and findings, several implications can be advanced. First, the study offers relevant insight for school leaders, administrators and Latino parents contemplating selecting a charter school to enroll their children in similar school contexts. Second, the study provides suggestions for future inquiry. As the school choice movement, specifically charter schools, continues to expand, further inquiry may enhance our understanding of the charter schools' significance, intricacies, administrative challenges and other related aspects. Traditional school leaders can benefit from what charter school parents are saying about what they want in a school, and benefit from considering some of the charter school practices.

As Latino parents’ perceptions of charter schools illustrate, campus leaders, teachers, counselors and other educational professionals must continue promoting rigorous curricula and a culture of success. This will encourage student access to teachers and staff and maintain the current bilingual services offered through the schools’ academic tutoring and homework assistance. Furthermore, charter school leaders must strive to maintain safe spaces for parental engagement that offer positive and welcoming campus experiences, such as home visits, informational meetings, and parent engagement opportunities. Finally, school leaders must keep in mind that being available to students

and acknowledging family history through their native language can effectively serve as a strategy for fostering a familial environment.

Future research may include an attempt to identify school leaders' perceptions; a focus on different backgrounds of the teachers, parents and students; or increasing the sample to include fathers. Others may expand the study to include suburban areas in elementary schools, since this study only looked at two urban secondary schools. Additional research might also illuminate how “sibling preference or privilege” affects parents’ decisions or students’ experiences within the framework of sibling preference. Other related studies might follow a quantitative approach and include different data sources, such as surveys and observations.

It is feasible to suggest that parents wishing to explore more deeply the idea of a charter school enrollment for their children, understand the reasons, strategies, impactful factors, and decision-making process that emerged from this study. In addition, for parents already engaged in the school choice movement, this study offers additional background information on two highly TEA-rated charter schools in a larger urban setting that are similar in academic operational structures. As charter schools expand to accommodate the increasing number of students, this option is growing. Given the current demand, parents will face a more competitive school choice market, as is observed in the long waiting lists, the intricate admission and enrollment processes, and other challenges.

It is imperative to note that this study is an exploratory study conducted within an urban context and includes only two secondary charter schools, one middle and one high school. According to the TEA accountability A-F system, both schools received an “A” rating, the highest rating. Fifteen Latino parents participated. There were fourteen mothers purposefully selected, and one father who was not chosen deliberately but offered his perspective along with his wife. No school leaders, teachers or students were included in this study. Data was collected through interviews and document analysis only. Thus, the generalizability of this study’s findings is limited.

For the most part, this study reflects a positive perspective on charter schools. It is crucial to expand the knowledge and explore other related factors, such as unexpected consequences, financial costs, and school operations; further inquiry is still needed to address specific questions. For instance, Goodman asks, “How do these schools, as compared with more controlling models, serve their students throughout the years? Can they, should they, become increasingly the norm rather than the exception?” (2013, p. 95). These questions would help guide the focus of further research to unearth relevant knowledge and information concerning the advantages of charter schools, or alternately discourage parents’ considerations when searching for educational options.

Conclusion

There is a growing interest in charter schools as an option to educate children from diverse backgrounds and, as a result, many schools have long waiting lists of aspiring students hoping for a seat. There is a process Latino parents must engage in

when selecting a public charter school versus a traditional public school for their children, and this search illustrates how that decision-making process worked for the parents who participated in this study. When parents look for a school, the natural inclination is to consider other traditional educational options characterized by the quality of programs, services, and support that meet their children's immediate and long-term goals.

This study was an attempt to illuminate Latino parents' fundamental reasons for selecting a charter school and the process they employ when choosing the best middle or high school for their children. As parents continue to engage in the school choice movement, particular attention should be given to assessing all factors that parents believe play a role in their selection of a charter school choice. The results may enable schools to address students' academic and social-emotional needs to attract and retain zealous students. The aftereffects may also encourage parents to remain open-minded and enlist charter schools as true partners for the education of all students.

Appendix A

Letter To The District Approval Committee

RE: Permission to Conduct Research Study

Dear Approval Committee,

As part of my Doctoral degree in Education Leadership and Policy at The University of Texas at Austin, I will be conducting a study that will examine Latino parental decision-making to select a charter school within a large urban school district in Texas. The focus will explore Latino parents' motivations to enroll their children in secondary public charter schools over traditional public secondary schools. The name of the district and campus will remain confidential and remain anonymous throughout the research and treatise.

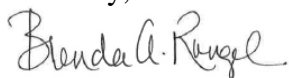
I hope that the XXXX Approval Committee will assist me in recruiting six parents (two parents per grade level) from the middle school to be interviewed. Interested parents, who volunteer to participate, will be given a consent form to be signed and returned before the researcher's interview.

If approval is granted, parent participants will be interviewed via zoom conferencing or in-person via a place convenient for the participant yet using all COVID19 social distancing measures. The interview will last 45-60 minutes. The results of the interview will remain confidential and anonymous. Therefore, no costs will be incurred by either your school/center or the individual participants.

Your approval to distribute flyers/letters of invitation for this study will be much appreciated. Next week, I will follow up with a telephone call and be happy to answer any questions or concerns. You may also contact me at Brangel@utexas.edu or 713-834-7855.

If you agree, kindly sign this document and return this document electronically via email. Alternatively, kindly submit a signed letter of permission on your institution's letterhead, acknowledging your consent and authorization to recruit participants for this study on the school grounds.

Sincerely,



Brenda A. Rangel
Doctoral Student, The University of Texas at Austin

Appendix B

Letter To The Campus Leader

RE: Permission to Conduct Research Study

Dear Principal XXXX,

As part of my Doctoral degree in Education Leadership and Policy at The University of Texas at Austin, I will be conducting a study that will examine Latino parental decision-making to select a charter school within a large urban school district in Texas. The focus will explore Latino parents' motivations to enroll their children in secondary public charter schools over traditional public secondary schools. The name of the district and campus will remain confidential and remain anonymous throughout the research and treatise.

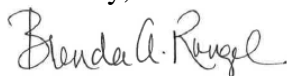
I hope that the school administration will recruit six parents from the middle school (two at each grade level) to be interviewed. Interested parents, who volunteer to participate, will sign a consent form before the researcher's interview.

If approval is granted, parent participants will be interviewed via zoom conferencing conveniently for the participant. The interview will last 45-60 minutes. The names of the parent participants will remain confidential. No costs will be incurred by either your campus or the individual participants.

Your approval to distribute flyers/letters of invitation for this study will be much appreciated. Next week, I will follow up with a telephone call and be happy to answer any questions or concerns. You may also contact me at Brangel@utexas.edu or 713-834-7855.

If you agree, kindly sign this document and return it electronically via email. Alternatively, kindly submit a signed letter of permission on your institution's letterhead, acknowledging your consent and authorization for me to recruit participants for this study on the school grounds.

Sincerely,



Brenda A. Rangel

Doctoral Student, The University of Texas at Austin

Appendix C

Study Participant Recruitment Flyer



Latino Parent Decision-Making in selecting a Public Urban Charter School

Researcher: Brenda A. Rangel

Brenda A. Rangel from the College of Education and Leadership Department at the University of Texas, Austin, is recruiting participants for a research study about Latino parental decision-making to select a charter school within Texas's large urban school district. This study may help us better understand Latino parents' motivation to enroll their children in secondary public charter schools over traditional public secondary schools.

You are eligible to participate in this study if you meet the following criteria:

- ❖ Be the decision-maker who selected the charter school
- ❖ Be a parent for at least one complete year in the charter school
- ❖ Represent a grade level at the middle school (six) or high school (nine)
- ❖ Be nominated by the school campus principal or volunteer

The study will take place via zoom conferencing or in-person using all COVID 19 social distancing measures. Your participation will last up to one hour.

As part of participating, you will be asked to answer questions regarding selecting this charter school over a traditional public school in an urban setting.

Participants will receive communication in writing about the study's voluntary nature, the ability to withdraw from the scholarship at any time, and the option to decline to respond to any question.

If you are interested in participating in this study, don't hesitate to contact Brenda A. Rangel at Brangel@Utexas.edu or at 713-834-7855.

I appreciate your consideration,

Brenda A. Rangel

Doctoral Student, The University of Texas at Austin

Appendix D

Letter To Participant

Dear Parent,

This letter is an invitation to participate in a study I am conducting as part of my Doctoral degree in Education Leadership and Policy at The University of Texas at Austin. The research examines Latino parental decision-making in selecting public charter schools within Texas' large urban school district.

The main focus will explore Latino parents' motivation to enroll their children in secondary public charter schools over traditional public secondary schools.

Enclosed in the email, you will find a consent form that explains your rights as a participant. This document also provides information about the procedures for this study. If you agree to participate in this research study, please sign DocuSign Participant Consent Form and return it by clicking on the complete link.

Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time from this study should you choose to do so. Data collected during interviews will be completely confidential. Your identity or that of your child will not be disclosed. However, the information gained will help school leaders understand how parents make choices and what information they have and possibly need when selecting charter high schools.

You will be contacted shortly by phone to schedule the interview. Thank you for your interest in this study.

Sincerely,

Brenda A. Rangel
Doctoral Student
The University of Texas at Austin

Appendix E

Interview Guide & Questions

Thank you for accepting to participate in this study. This interview aims to learn why parents enroll their child/children in a charter school. The following questions are designed to guide this interview, and you can add any additional details and relevant information.

Introduction

- 1) Please tell me about yourself (this can relate to personal, work, or family).
- 2) How many children do you have? Do all attend a charter school?
- 3) How long have you been a charter school parent?
- 4) What charter school and grade level does your child attend?
- 5) What school district did your child attend before? What grade level?
- 6) Tell me about this charter school.

Why do Latino parents select secondary public charter schools over traditional public schools in a large urban school district?

- 1) Do you know anyone that attends this charter school?
- 2) What prompted you to enroll your child (children) in this charter school?
- 3) Where did you hear about this charter school? If a person, who and what did they say?
- 4) What did you hear about this charter school?
- 5) What was your purpose for enrolling your child (children) in this charter school?
- 6) Why did you choose this charter school? What was appealing or interesting about this school?

What strategies do Latino parents use when selecting a secondary public charter school for their children?

- 1) How did you learn about this charter school? If talking to someone, who and what did they say?
- 2) Did you visit the school before selecting it? What were your initial impressions?
- 3) If you did not visit the school, how did you learn about it?
- 4) What information did you use to select a school your child would attend?
- 5) What did you do once you had information about this charter school?
- 6) What else did you do?
- 7) What did you do to enroll your child (children) in this charter school?

What factors influence Latino parents' decision-making when selecting a secondary public charter school in a large urban district?

- 1) What did you consider essential to enroll your child (children) in this charter school?
- 2) What influenced you to decide to apply to this charter school?
- 3) As you thought about selecting this charter school, what would you say were the characteristics/qualities? The teachers? The reputation of the school? Is the education provided? The administrators? Other?
- 4) Did anyone suggest you consider this charter school? What did they say?
- 5) How was the application process to enroll your child (children) in this Charter school?

How do Latino parents decide to enroll their children in a secondary public charter school?

- 1) How did you go about deciding to enroll your child (children) in this charter school?
- 2) What did you do to make your decision to enroll your child (children) in this charter school?
- 3) Did you ask anyone to assist you in making your decision to enroll your child (children) in this charter school? If yes, who? How did they help you?
- 4) What information (course offerings, curriculum, test scores, teachers, school leaders, extracurricular activities, safety, transportation, support services) did you have?
- 5) How did you use such information (what did you do) before deciding that this was the charter school for your child (children)?
- 6) How did you obtain the above information? Where?
- 7) What did you do once you decided this was the charter school for your child (children)?

Appendix F

Consent For Parent Participant

Latino Parent Decision-Making in selecting a Public Urban Charter School

Please read this consent document carefully before you decide to participate in this study. You are invited to participate in this qualitative study to examine the experiences of parents who chose the charter school for their child.

The study examines Latino parental decision-making to select a charter school within Texas's large urban school district. The main focus will explore Latino parents' motivation to enroll their children in secondary public charter schools over traditional public secondary schools.

Brenda A. Rangel, a doctoral student in Education Leadership and Policy at The University of Texas at Austin, is conducting this study. Your participation would involve an interview session, which would last approximately 45-60 minutes. Your interview will be recorded with your permission and then transcribed. You may request that the recording be stopped during the interview. The transcribed notes will then be provided to you either in person, via certified mail, or electronically to review and edit, should you choose to. The researcher only will have access to the recordings and transcriptions.

Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time from this study should you choose to do so. Data collected during interviews will be completely confidential. Your identity or that of your child will not be disclosed. However, the information gained will help school leaders understand how parents make choices regarding charter versus public schools.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to obtain information, ask questions, or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher(s), don't hesitate to get in touch with the following:

Dr. Ruben Olivarez
Research Chair and PI
Phone: 512-363-3715
Email: rolivarez@austin.utexas.edu

The University of Texas at Austin
Institutional Review Board
Phone: 512-232-1543
Email: irb@austin.utexas.edu

YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS FORM WHETHER OR NOT YOU AGREE TO PARTICIPATE.

If you agree to participate in this study, please sign on the next page. Thank you.

TITLE OF THE STUDY:

Latino Parent Decision-Making in selecting a Public Urban Charter School

Agreement:

I have read the procedure described above. I voluntarily agree to participate in the process, and I have received a copy of this description. I understand that this interview will be recorded via zoom.

Name (Printed):

Signature:

Date:

Principal Investigator:

Date:

I agree to allow this interview to be video-recorded. However, I understand that I can request that the recording be stopped at any time.

Signature:

Your signature indicates your consent to participate in this study.

Appendix G

IRB Exempt Determination



The University of Texas at Austin

Office of Research Support & Compliance
Institutional Review Board
P.O. Box 7426, Campus Code A3200
Austin, Texas 78713
T: 512-232-1543 F: 512-471-8873
Email: irb@austin.utexas.edu
www.research.utexas.edu/ors

EXEMPT DETERMINATION

March 23, 2021

FWA # 00002030

Ruben Olivarez
1912 SPEEDWAY
AUSTIN, TX 78712

+1 512 475 8576
ro246@eid.utexas.edu

Dear Ruben Olivarez:

On 3/23/2021, the IRB reviewed the following submission:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Special Determinations:	None
Title:	Latino Parent Decision-Making in selecting a Public Urban Charter School
Investigator:	Ruben Olivarez
IRB ID:	STUDY00000800
Funding:	None
Grant ID:	None
IND, IDE, or HDE:	None
Approval Date:	3/23/2021
Documents Reviewed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Brenda A. Rangel, Category: IRB Protocol;• Acceptance of study, Category: Other;• Letter to District Approval Committee, Category: Other;• Letter to District Approval Committee, Category: Other;• Letter to Principal Category: Other;• Letter to Principal, Category: Other;• Parent Consent Form, Category: Consent Form;• Parent Interview Questions, Category: Other;• Parent Notification of Study, Category: Consent Form;



	• Recruitment Flyer, Category: Recruitment Materials;
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The IRB determined that this protocol meets the criteria for exemption from IRB review under 45 CFR 46.104 (2)(ii) Tests, surveys, interviews, or observation (low risk).

In conducting this protocol you are required to follow the requirements listed in HRP-103 - INVESTIGATOR MANUAL.

Ongoing IRB review and approval by this organization is not required. This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. Modifications that involve a change in PI, increase risk, or otherwise affect the exempt category or the criteria for exempt determination must be submitted as a modification. Investigators are strongly encouraged to contact the IRB staff to describe any changes prior to submitting an amendment.

If you have any questions, contact the RSC by phone at 512 -232-1543 or via e-mail at irb@austin.utexas.edu.

Sincerely,

Institutional Review Board

University of Texas at Austin

cc:

Ruben Olivarez (PI), Brenda Rangel (Primary Contact)

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